

## How Strong Louisiana Families Survive Disaster

Louisiana families have experienced more than their share of disasters over the generations and have come out strong.

Each type of disaster, whether natural or man-made, presents some unique concerns. Natural disasters sometimes can be predicted, since some of them, such as hurricanes, are seasonal and provide some degree of warning. Man-made disasters carry with them some degree of ambiguity, since the onset could be a surprise and the outcome might take longer to reach.

As for similarities, both can create destruction of property and potentially alter lives of many families and threaten the culture of communities. Among survivors of major disasters, there are four common perceptions:

- Individuals and families think of disasters as highly dangerous and fear for their lives and the lives of others.
- People feel helpless during a disaster, since they cannot control the disaster nor prevent the destruction that occurs.
- Disasters can bring about major damage and disruption – causing far-reaching effects on individuals and families.
- Disaster survivors feel a sense of loss that often is overwhelming. This loss may involve homes, loved ones, personal belongings, neighborhoods and potentially even their way of life.

All things being equal, families who have the most difficulty in recovering from disasters are those families who had difficulty coping before the disaster. How the family looks at the disaster, the support system that exists in the community and among family and friends and prior experiences in coping with disasters all predict to some degree how families manage after a disaster.

For example, Louisiana families who waited for aid after hurricanes Katrina and Rita were less likely to report they felt optimistic about their futures and finding meaning out of adversity. But those families who appeared to “take the bull by the horns” and began repairs and cleanup with their families, friends and neighbors appeared to feel more in control of their lives and optimistic.

Strong Louisiana families who appeared to have the “coping tools” to survive disaster had these characteristics or actions in common:

- Preparation and anticipation. Disasters are not new to Louisiana. Natural disasters such as hurricanes are part of the way of life. Families who make plans in advance of a disaster, such as where to go in case the family gets separated, and those who are prepared with “grab and go” evacuation kits (including copies of Social Security cards, insurance papers, other important documents, emergency cash and so forth) are more likely to feel in control during a disaster.
- Being there for each other. Immediate or extended family and friendships that have been nurtured over time offer a safe environment in which to cry, scream, complain or whatever and to receive encouragement and



emotional support. The feeling that someone will be there for you makes you more likely to recover successfully.

- Optimism. A family who expects to recover and come out as survivors “on the other side” of a disaster is more likely to do so. Based on the positive outlook, they become what they determine they will be.
- A desire for normalcy. Families who search for and re-establish a sense of normalcy all benefit from a return to some semblance of normalcy. Returning to routines, such as children going back to school and studies, resuming the daily motorcycle ride to unwind (if that was part of the earlier routine), returning to church or Bible study classes each week and so forth, will help. For children, in particular, routine is a great comfort and a sign that things will be OK.
- Assessment and problem-solving. Discussing as a family where you all are in progress toward recovery and making decisions about where to go from here together (whether that includes job changes or relocation to another community) are

important. Just taking a general reality check as opposed to blaming an oil company for a spill or the levee builders for a breach in the system will help you to avoid being frozen in time and slower to recover. Taking action has recuperative benefits.

- Look for sources of help. Waiting for someone else to do what may be considered the “right thing” may result in a long, unproductive wait. For example, many residents of Cordova, Alaska, experienced such waits after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. There are many programs out there, particularly after a disaster, that families can take advantage of for temporary assistance. Contact your church, friends, neighbors and others and ask about Disaster Recovery Centers. Or call your local Cooperative Extension Service office to ask where there may be resource centers set up to help.

Louisianans are strong survivors. Strong families communicate with each other, help each other, are there for each other, are problem-solvers, are optimistic and are eager

to get back to normal. We are survivors, not victims.

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Personal communication with Angela Arnold, resident of Cordova, Alaska, September 2010.

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Exercise also strengthens muscles, keeps joints supple, combats stiffness and improves posture. Physical activity helps preserve full range of motion in people with arthritis.

People who are physically active also age better. As part of the aging process, we lose muscle and gain fat. Exercise helps you keep the muscle and lose the fat.

Preserving muscle mass and strength can mean the difference in living independently or requiring nursing home care as we age. Even a simple task such as tying shoes is impossible without sufficient muscular strength.

Exercise speeds weight loss by burning calories. Most Americans spend much of their time in activities that require little energy, such as sitting or watching television.

If you lose weight without exercise, you lose both fat and muscle. Exercise helps you to build muscle and lose inches, resulting in a firmer, trimmer figure.

Dieting and weight loss slow down your metabolism (calories you burn daily). Exercising during a diet may help offset this drop in metabolic rate.

Exercise is important for losing weight and successfully keeping it off. Studies show that a year or more after losing weight, those who are exercising tend to keep the pounds off.

Beth Reames, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.N., Professor and Extension Specialist Family and Health

## Exercise Has Many Benefits

Regular physical activity is needed for our health, sense of well-being and a healthy body weight.

It's a natural emotional stress-reliever and can aid in managing anxiety and mild to moderate depression. Regular activity also reduces insomnia and improves sleep habits.

Being active improves the circulation of oxygen and nutrients to your brain and body cells, which helps you feel better and have more energy. Being active on a regular basis increases stamina, endurance and resistance to illness, as well as building self-confidence and a sense of well-being. In addition to all of those benefits, it also decreases constipation problems.

Regular physical activity reduces the risk of many diseases including high blood pressure, stroke, coronary artery disease, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer and osteoporosis.

Exercise is important for a healthy heart because it increases the efficiency of your heart, blood vessels and lungs and helps to decrease blood pressure and lower resting heart rate.

Being active decreases blood cholesterol, triglycerides and glucose, all of which increase risk of heart disease, and raises heart-healthy HDL cholesterol levels.

Regular physical activity makes bones stronger and helps prevent bone loss and osteoporosis. Weight-bearing exercise may help prevent osteoporosis by increasing bone mass during growth, maintaining bone mass during adulthood and reducing the rate of bone loss during aging.



# Good Nutrition for Women

Eating healthfully is one of the most important things women can do to achieve and maintain good health.

But there are nutrients that may be lacking in some women's diets – and such deficiencies can be linked to health problems. Among the nutrients some women may be short on are:

## Calcium

Low calcium intake can lead to bone fractures and osteoporosis. The hormonal changes occurring after menopause also accelerate bone loss. The good news is you can reduce your risk of osteoporosis by getting enough calcium, vitamin D and weight-bearing exercise.

Daily calcium needs for an adult woman are approximately 1,000 milligrams. After the age of 50, the need increases to 1,200 milligrams. Three cups of milk supply about 900 milligrams of calcium. In addition to dairy products, good sources of calcium are calcium-fortified cereals and soy drinks, tofu made with calcium sulfate, canned salmon and sardines and leafy, dark green vegetables.

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps the body use calcium to build strong bones and teeth and maintain muscle strength. Vitamin D, known as the “sunshine vitamin,” can be found in foods and is made in our bodies when skin is exposed to sunlight's UV rays.

The Recommended Dietary Allowance for vitamin D increases with age: those 50 and younger need 200 IU (international units); ages 50 to 70 need 400 IU; and, those over 70 need at least 600 IU.

Good food sources of vitamin D include vitamin D-fortified milk and orange juice, fatty fish such as salmon and sardines, egg yolks and fortified breakfast cereals.

## Folate

Birth defects, such as spina bifida, can be prevented by consuming adequate daily amounts of the B vitamins, folate or folic acid.

The daily recommendation for all women capable of becoming pregnant is 400 micrograms of folic acid from fortified foods and/or supplements. Good sources of folate include spinach, navy beans, peas, nuts, lentils, oranges and enriched grain foods.

## Iron

Iron-deficiency anemia may occur because of blood loss through menstruation.

Women ages 19 through 50 need 18 milligrams of iron each day, more than twice the amount men need. Besides becoming anemic, iron deficiency may cause fatigue and affect performance.

Meat, fish and poultry are rich in iron. Other foods high in iron include spinach, chard, beans (pinto, kidney, black), lentils, split peas and iron-fortified grain foods (cereals, pastas and bread).

## Fiber

Lack of fiber can lead to certain types of cancers, heart disease and constipation.

The recommended intake of fiber for adults is 20-35 milligrams a day. Good sources of fiber include apples, blueberries, figs, raisins, broccoli, carrots, peas, lentils, brown rice and whole-wheat pasta and bread.

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# Dealing with Debt Collectors

Behind on your bills? Being harassed by debt collectors? The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act affords many protections to consumers who are behind on their bills.

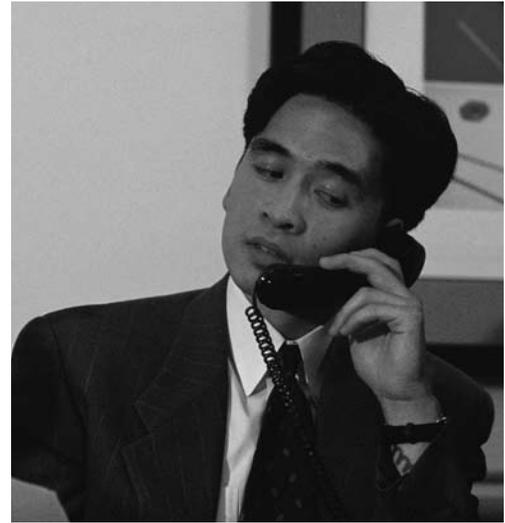
Provisions of the act apply to debt collectors – anyone hired to collect what is owed to creditors for personal, family and household debts.

Within five days of the first contact a debt collector has with you, the debt collector must send you a notice that tells you the name of the creditor, how much you owe and the specific actions to take if you believe you don't owe the money.

If you owe the money or part of it, contact the creditor to arrange payment. If you believe you don't owe the money, contact the creditor in writing and send a copy to the collection agency with a letter telling them not to contact you.

Debt collectors may not:

- Contact you at unreasonable times – for example, before 8 am or after 9 pm, unless you agree.
- Contact you at work if you tell the debt collector that your employer disapproves.
- Contact you after you write a letter telling them to stop, except to notify you the debt collector or creditor plans to take a specific action.
- Contact your friends, relatives, employer or others, except to find out where you live and work.



- Harass you with profane language, repeated telephone calls or threats to harm you.
- Make false statements or claim that you will be arrested.
- Threaten to have money deducted from your paycheck or to sue you, unless the collection agency or creditor intends to do so and it is legal for them to do so.

To file a complaint against a debt collector, contact the Louisiana Attorney General's Consumer Protection Section (800-351-4889 or [www.ag.state.la.us](http://www.ag.state.la.us)) or the Federal Trade Commission's Bureau of Consumer Protection (888-382-4357 or [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov)).

Reference: Consumer Action Handbook. (2010). [www.ConsumerAction.gov](http://www.ConsumerAction.gov)

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