

READY, STEADY, GO



IMAGINING THE UNIMAGINABLE by JEN RAE

photography by Emma Byrnes

READY STEADY GO

Prior to coming to Australia from Canada - emergency kits were something we always kept in the trunk/boot of the car especially in winter. Packed were items such as chains, kitty litter, wool blankets, instant heat packs, energy gels, warm clothes, blankets and flares. And, they could mean the difference between life and death if you were to spin-out on black ice into a ditch, hit a deer, have a breakdown, or need to sit out a blizzard. In Australia - the context is different and the climate emergency takes preparedness to a whole new level.

Imagining the Unimaginable

In May 2018 - Ambulance Victoria's State Health Commander Paul Holman led the *REFUGE* lab participants through an autopsy of the 2016 Victorian thunderstorm asthma event. He started by saying "Imagine the unimaginable..." and then began to describe how 14,000 people were taken to hospital and how ten people lost their lives in the freak weather event. He spoke about learned helplessness, circumstances where the public has developed a conditioned sense of reliance on emergency services and may not act in their own best interest in an emergency (e.g. waiting for help instead of doing what they can do themselves to help the situation); the limited capacity of emergency services to respond to disasters of that scale; and, how increasing and cumulative climate-related disaster events will affect the ability of emergency services to respond quickly in the future. In 2018, Holman advised that Ambulance Victoria, along with emergency service providers in cities across the world, were shifting communications and encouraging communities to be more self-reliant in the event of major disaster events. Some cities are now asking populations to prepare to be self-sufficient for 48 -72 hours and sometimes even longer to receive help in case of emergency.

Our ability to recognise and act on these realities may help us in the future. Therefore, now is the time to shift into preparedness thinking. If we can self-audit our skills, knowledge, resources, relationships, environments, assets and liabilities, we are better placed to identify where there is room for improvement before an emergency strikes.

In 2018, I posed the question at home to my family 'what would we do in an emergency if no one came when we called 000?' This led us into imagining emergency scenarios we might encounter and prompted us into planning and preparations in case of emergency.

READY, STEADY, GO originated with a list of items that I wanted to collect to make my family's emergency *Grab + Go* kits. It was a practical exercise from years of research and learning from emergency services. During the Australian bushfire crisis in 2019, I shared this list with a small community of friends and colleagues before later hearing it had been more widely shared. Our family's list is best understood by sharing the context and considerations informing our decision making, planning and what items are included, with the hope that the project might inspire others to ask questions and make their own lists that are context-specific to their own needs and those in their immediate care groups.

READY STEADY GO

It should also be noted that you can easily go out and purchase a ready-made *Bug-Out Bag at the Survival Shop Preppers Warehouse* if you're into camo or fluoro for about \$1400; a Kim Kardashian approved *Judy* kit for about \$60-\$250 USD; or \$6000 for the deluxe *Costco* kit that will feed a family for a year.

But, will these ready-made kits meet your needs or those of your family and/or immediate community in the type of emergency you are likely to experience? An earthquake is very different to a bushfire depending whether you live in a minimalist inner-city apartment, an under-privileged suburb or a farm. A ready-made kit may offer a false sense of security especially if the items are a one-size fits all, are foreign objects to you, have expired goods after being stored indefinitely or if you have allergies.

We imagined three emergency scenarios our family may encounter in the near future where we might have to consider evacuation, stay + wait, or leave indefinitely.

The three questions informing our scenarios:

- **READY (Grab + Go kit)**

What if our family had to leave on short notice and end up in a relief centre or at someone's house for 3-5 days?

- **STEADY (Self-reliance kit)**

What would we need to have on hand to be self-reliant if at home for a week without utilities?

- **GO (Car kit - trunk)**

What would we need/want to take if we had to leave our house for an indefinite period of time with the prospect of returning? [it's likely we will work through the fourth scenario of not returning at some point in the near future]

We scaffolded our list of items through six considerations and our economic means:

1. What are our essentials? In our case, things like eyeglasses, medications, a map, food, photocopies of our important documents, a first aid kit, a dog leash and personal care items were on the top of our lists.
2. What do we need for comfort? eg changes of clothes, a familiar blanket, a comfort object, headphones and our Aeropress.
3. What will we need to communicate? eg walkie talkies, phone chargers and a list of important phone numbers.
4. What can we pack for entertainment? eg games, colouring books and a hand cranked radio.
5. What can we pack to trade? eg chocolate, cash and alcohol.
6. What can we pack to share and to make community? eg lollies, tea bags, tools, seeds and Vegemite.

READY STEADY GO

Your plans

After going through the birth of a child we know that nothing goes as planned but having a couple of strategies in place and thinking through processes of evacuation or power shortages might make a significant difference in how your emergency response unfolds. In our household, we have designated roles and responsibilities for leaving. There is a checklist of things we need to do and also grab in addition to our packs if we have to evacuate quickly. For instance: Refrigerated medicines, mementos box, wallets, passports, computers, phones and Greenfeet (the teddy bear). Turn off gas, power and water, and lock all doors and windows if time allows. Welfare plans for animals - those that will have to stay put and those that will come with us.

Plans to stay (as the Covid-19 crisis has revealed) also require some planning. For instance, ensuring all prescriptions are up-to-date or other essential items that may be in short supply or hard to access over time; enough food for your humans and animals for at least 2-3 weeks; keeping all of your devices charged; having cash on hand; setting up rosters to check-in on others; and, any other considerations that may need planning for each member of your immediate care group.

Walk through it. Talk about it at dinner. Involve everyone.

Analogue preparedness

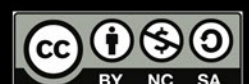
What happens if you don't have wifi/4G access or lose your phone in an emergency? I can remember my first phone number and three others. Only one lives in Australia. Take a moment to compile a list of phone numbers that you might need in an emergency. Include those who are geographically close to you, work and childcare numbers, family, friends and important local services such as the hospital, your doctors and vet. You might also consider doing the same with your emails and important passwords. Make copies of important documents or policies such as passports, house deeds, insurances, licenses, certificates, immunisation records. If you will need to prove identification, ownership, legal status, income, healthcare or anything important to you or others in your care group, ensure you have copies in both digital (USB) and analogue form. You can also upload documents into cloud platforms such as Google, Dropbox and Evernote. This takes longer to compile than you'd expect, so make it a priority and set some time aside to work on. It will help put your mind at rest.

- Jen Rae (May 2020)



Ready, Steady, Go is a collaboration between *Jen Rae* and *Emma Byrnes* and was supported by the City of Melbourne COVID-19 Arts Grants.

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#1

Dreamy unicorns colouring book, UNO, deck of cards, games pack

Our four-year old Viv loves drawing, unicorns and rainbows. In an emergency an activity like drawing/colouring helps with mindfulness and can be a good distraction for littlies and grown-ups. We also included games that could help relieve boredom, could be offered to older kids to play with or to engage with an elderly member of the community in a relief centre scenario.

- * ENTERTAINMENT
- * COMFORT
- * COMMUNITY



#2

Children's yoghurt drink, muesli, lollies, chewing gum, tea, dried fruit and protein bars

We 'test-drove' the yoghurt drink with Viv before putting it in our kit. She asked if she could have another one right away. We explained that she could if we ever need to leave the house in an emergency. We hope that if an emergency strikes it will be something that will comfort her. If the use-by date comes before an evacuation, Viv will get the pack to drink and we'll replace it with something else. Gum and lollies are great boredom breakers. Nutrient rich dried fruit is good to pack to replenish your system during high stress situations.

- * ESSENTIALS
- * COMFORT



#3

Baked beans, dried soup mix, canned tuna, passata tetra pack

Our kits have different inventories of essential foods. The quick pack has lightweight and nutrient-dense packaged foods that could get us through for about 3 days without rationing. They are not our favourite foods, but they will suffice and could be good for ration-ability. Foods selected in our other inventories consider:

- 1 - preparation methods and tools
- 2 - inputs (e.g. water) and outputs (e.g. wastes)
- 3 - allergies and nutritional load
- 4 - comfort and ration-ability

* ESSENTIALS



#4

Comfort object, textas, notebook

It is likely Viv will grab Greenfeet, Marisol or some other trusted comfort object, but if for some reason she can't she has chosen this bilby to be in our *Grab + Go* emergency kit.

Textas and a notebook could be a godsend for warding off boredom in a relief centre or if we are stuck somewhere.

* Entertainment

* Comfort

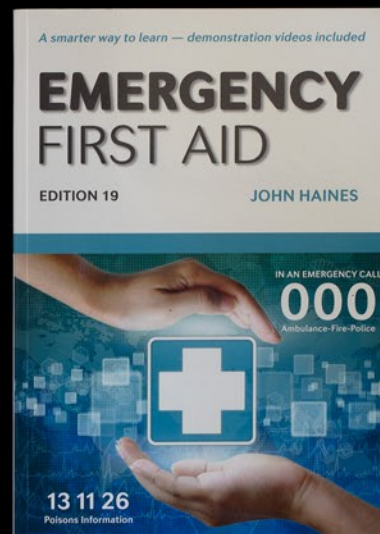
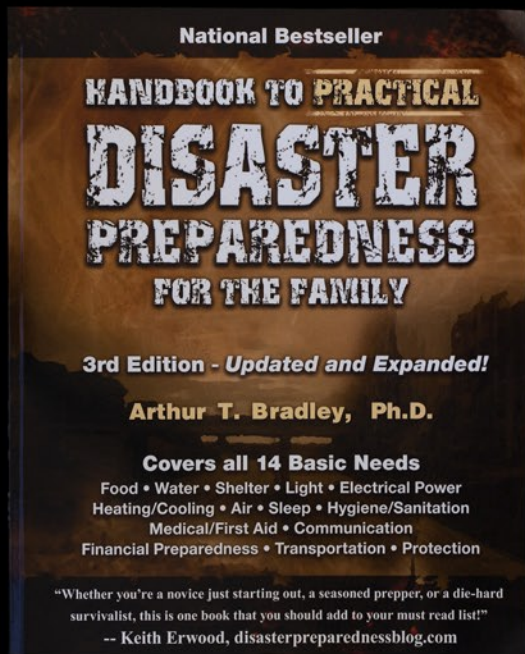


#5

Matches, waterproof container, carabiner, tweezers, tissues, thermometer, antibacterial wipes, baby wipes, water purification tablets

Most of these we found as extras in the house before collating them into our *Grab + Go* emergency kit essentials. If I was to choose the two most important essentials I'd probably say the thermometer and matches because I can live with a few stray face hairs and dirty faces/surfaces. Whilst these two items can assist in sterilisation processes, comfort and care.

* Essentials



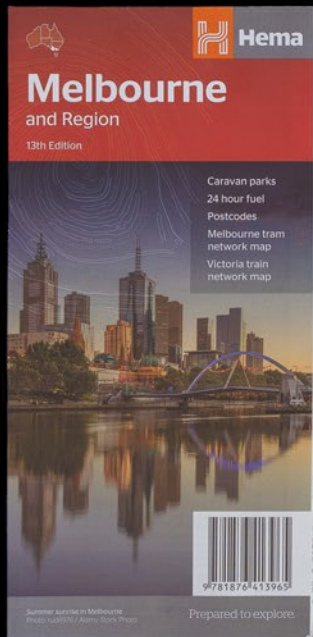
#6

Disaster preparedness and first aid handbooks

My partner Sally recently updated her first aid certification while I got very serious about our first aid kits and resources. Any sort of beginner handbook that offers survival tips, hacks, foraging, first aid, etc. that is relevant to your context should be added to your kit. There is no use lugging around a Bear Gryllis' encyclopedia* with how-to drink your own urine and stitch your own leg wound in your *Grab + Go* pack.

* Note: most survival/disaster preparedness guides are written by a certain *ahem* demographic with unrelatable facts, recommendations and overwhelming lists. This handbook here suits our family for its practicality as a resource. No handbook will tick all the boxes and cover all contexts.

* Essentials



#7

Map, sewing kit, clothes pegs, 3-in-1 tool (compass, thermometer, whistle), wool/string, small multi-purpose tool, plastic sealable bags

In the likelihood that we are somewhere without mobile reception or have to give directions in a blackout (e.g. sans Google Map), a paper map and/or a compass could make a big difference for navigating and movement on foot or in a vehicle.

* Essentials



#8

Large multi-purpose tool, scissors, permanent textas, tapes, blue tac, bulldog clips, large elastic bands, post-it notes, rope and an extra pair of prescription eyeglasses

If there is anything you or anyone in your immediate family/care group are completely reliant upon for daily living then spares should be included in your essentials kits. This could be hearing aid batteries, prescription eyeglasses, medications, hormones, syringes, denture adhesives, orthopaedic support or braces, etc.

A small pack of office supplies could come in handy in an emergency especially around organising mobilisation and response (e.g. hanging signs, making lists, sharing phone numbers, etc.).

- * Essentials
- * Communications



#9

Umbrella, ear plugs, goggles, work gloves and waterproof bag

Communal sleeping activities are anxiety inducing for some, let alone in an emergency. Insomnia and sleep deprivation can really prevent you from functioning optimally in a crisis. In emergencies, adults need 7-8 hours of sleep per night (children at least 10-11 hours). Eye masks and/or ear plugs may be essential for sleeping where you might be interrupted by lights and/or unfamiliar sounds. Children may need different sizes for ear plugs.

In the case where there may be a threat and someone needs to stay alert, have a plan including a roster, exercises and activities. An umbrella could make a difference when you only have one spare set of clothes and it's raining. A brightly coloured one could also be used for navigation or signalling.

Eye protection - we recently replaced our yellow goggles after the bushfire crisis to ones that are more comfortable for someone who wears glasses.

* Essentials

* Comfort



#10

Mirror, eyewash cup and saline, safety pins, elastic bands, cough drops, electrolyte tablets, panadol, soap, cotton balls, ear swabs, deodorant and oral injury paste

Our pack of essentials expands and contracts as we condense and replace our necessities. A bottle of antiperspirant is replaced with a paste. Two packs of cough drops get included because not everyone likes Fisherman's Friend. I think we should include a bigger bottle of paracetamol and make sure we have a children's pack as well.

It's happened a few times on camping trips where one of us gets a mouth ulcer or tooth ache. Swishing in saline or coconut oil has helped in most cases but having a little bit of Orabase goes a long way when you're in discomfort and can't see a doctor or dentist.

* Essentials



#11

Sunscreen, toothpaste, salt, toothbrushes, paw paw ointment, dental floss, hand sanitiser, laundry soap, coconut oil and gastro-stop

Just don't get stuck without Gastro-stop. Period.

Besides food preservation and seasoning salt is a useful first aid item for your kit. You can use it for wound care (literally adding salt to a wound) to make saline for flushing eyes, mouths and gargling for throats and for disinfecting surfaces.

Speaking of infection...this little bottle of hand sanitiser is pre-Covid-19. It stands as a relic of times past, before hand sanitiser became a top 3 panic-buy item and traded in online blackmarkets or out the boot of a ute behind the local IGA.

* Essentials



#12

Canvas bag, paper protectors, comb, torch with extra batteries and quick dry towels

If you've ever carried a wet towel from a beach then you will know to invest in one or two "quick dry" chamois-style for emergencies.

* Essentials



#13

Emergency hand-crank radio and book of knots

I bought this book of knots from the National Maritime Museum gift shop for some reason. It might have been a panic purchase at the time. We were in Sydney and the bush fires were raging in the state. I might have felt inadequate about my abilities in rope wrangling.

In terms of the knot book, it has turned out to be very useful during the Covid-19 lockdown. We learned knots to hang a tire swing, make a bamboo curtain and a trellis for our garden peas.

Can I use this item out of an emergency context? This is now the criteria for future purchases, namely to keep us out of a hoarding 'preppers' mindset. We still want to live and enjoy the world without getting trapped in apocalyptic worrying. For example if you camp, then it's easier to rationalise the purchase of a generator or a solar charger because you can use it in and outside of an emergency context.

* Essentials

* Entertainment



#14

First Aid Kit

Purchase what you can afford now and invest in a better one later or ask for one for your birthday. This is an important one for your kit. Know what's inside and modify it to suit your needs or those in your immediate family/care group. For instance, we added some colourful and animal-themed plasters and compression socks for our family requirements.

* Essentials



#15

Muesli bars, canned fish, food packaging clips, tomato sauce, chocolate, peanut butter, Ruth Crow Tea and can opener

Things like chocolate can become a commodity in lean times and it definitely gets a high 'comfort' ranking for many folks therefore it makes a noteworthy addition in any emergency kit. You can eat out of date chocolate but it won't be as pleasant as fresh. Fat or sugar blooms will change the look and texture but it is still safe to eat. Strong odours and tastes may indicate rancid cocoa butter or other ingredients. Replenish your chocolate once a year and at the same time check the dates and condition of other items in your kits.

Peanut butter and tomato sauce can make almost anything edible.

Ruth Crow Tea comes with a good story about community mobilisation and making 'great things happen' in difficult times.

- * Essentials
- * Comfort
- * Trade
- * Community



#16

Ukulele, vodka and chalk

We have a spare ukulele, so one goes in the kit and the other stays out for everyday use. It's in there for both grownups and littlies. In a crisis, music can help take the edge off - much like a good shot of vodka. Both can bring community together when played/taken in moderation; and, in some instances could be valuable trade items.

Children are often overlooked in disaster response and recovery. In First Nations culture, protecting children from trauma is paramount. We have the ukulele and chalk in our kits for singing and games to relieve stress and boredom.

-
- * Entertainment
 - * Comfort
 - * Trade
 - * Community
 - * Share



#17

Heavy duty tarpaulin

A large tarp on hand could serve multiple purposes including rain catching, shelter, protection, ground cover, privacy barrier, hammock or makeshift stretcher.

We keep this one in our larger home emergency kit.

* Essentials



#18

Large piece of canvas, duct tape, N95 childrens masks or filters, portable cooking fuel and axe/hammer tool

A large piece of sturdy fabric has multiple uses including shade, slings and stretchers, filtering or pest protection. In the event of power outages, having alternatives for boiling water and/or cooking will bolster your self-sufficiency. Start with what you can afford and scale up when you can. A propane tank and BBQ or a camping stove is a good start.

We keep these in our larger home emergency kit.



#19

Survival guides and water bottle

“When all hell breaks loose.” A benefit of researching disaster preparedness is that I have a library of both good and really bad survival guides. I was once excited to find one written by a woman only to discover that Louise was actually a Louis and (like many other survival guide authors) was ex-military, white, middle-aged and had a receding hairline. Most survival guides focus on an individual’s survival needs or taking care of an immediate circle of people in lockdown from the rest of the world. The language used is “us vs. them” and ignores that everyone of us is part of a larger social ecosystem. Unless you live remotely it is worth considering the needs of those who are likely experiencing the same emergency with you. In choosing any sort of handbook consider your own context and the likely disaster scenarios you may encounter. Also invest in getting to know what skills and knowledge exist in your community and how you might contribute. We have a couple of great guides in our large home emergency kit. The rest remain on hand in the library for use as fire-starters.

* Essentials



#20

Aeropress, filters, sugar, portable cups and cutlery and coffee beans

We packed this coffee set-up in our *Grab + Go* kit because in a crisis having some sense of normalcy may make the difference between a good day and a bad one for ourselves or for others. It may even be a luxury to be shared or traded.

-
- * Comfort
 - * Trade
 - * Share
 - * Community



#21

Mini stove with fuel, emergency blanket, spare batteries and distilled white vinegar

Being able to boil water is essential for sterilising, drinking water purification (most cases) and sometimes food preparation. We have this packed in our *Grab + Go* but the likelihood is that wherever we end up in an emergency we should have access to electricity, gas or fire to boil water. This may be used if we get caught out or stranded in our vehicle. Just make sure you have something to boil it in - a tin can, billy or camp pots!

Both distilled white vinegar and apple cider vinegar are great to have in larger sized emergency kits for their multipurpose uses.

- * Comfort
- * Essentials
- * Community



#22

Dog leash, dog food and large bin liners

We have 10 other species with heartbeats in our home, so their care is integrated in our planning. It is the responsibility of animal owners and carers to plan for the safe transport and welfare of their animals in an emergency. This may include carriers, halters, food, medicine, etc. Check with your local council to see what services they may provide for animal welfare in emergencies (e.g. pet food bank, vet clinics, boarding, etc.). You may want to view this guide on preparing your animals for emergencies:
<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animalwelfare/preparing-animal-welfare-emergencies>



#23

Raincoat, wool socks and undies

I could leave the raincoat but not the socks and undies. Pack for each member of your care group including yourself.

-
- * Essentials
 - * Comfort



#24

Spare set of clothes and practical hats (summer and/or winter)

I write 'practical sunhat' because you don't want to be challenged by discomfort in an already discomfoting situation. A good hat may also become a basket, a filter or hold mosquito netting in place, depending on where your emergency is likely to occur and at what time of the year. Pack one for everyone.

* Essentials



#25

Plain flour, dry soup mix, dried pasta, rice, Vegemite, UHT milk, cutting board, knife and bowl

What non-perishables to pack is a personal and/or economic decision-making process.

You may also be considering storage space. A good start is to work with 1200 calories a day per person and multiply it by the number of days you are preparing for. Take into consideration food preparation and tools required.

For a *Grab + Go* kit - pack small nutrient-dense foods that will replenish your body when it is stressed. You will be fine eating these foods for the first 24-48 hours. After the adrenaline tap slows down, your body will need a more substantial meal.

* Essentials



#26

Cash, phone chargers, bandana/scarf, candles, lighters, carabiners, cable ties and latex gloves

I remember 'Hipstergeddon' in 2013 when a transformer blew affecting Moreland's north at dinner time throwing Sydney Road, the Upfield Line, Brunswick, Carlton, Coburg and Fitzroy into hours of darkness. In the late evening, social media was flooded with sad sign-offs from people on their last 1% of battery life.

A basic USB charger will go a long way if you have to leave your residence quickly. In times when you have more notice, it is good practice to keep all of your devices charged along with any external batteries. In your large kit, consider compiling a checklist of your devices and cords to grab if you have time for a longer evacuation.



#27

Wool blanket, headlamp, small shovel and good footwear

A shovel is an essential when you have snow to contend with. In Australia a shovel is a good idea for things you might need to deal with such as sanitation, building, fire tending or gardening. Op-shops are excellent places to find good wool blankets. Pack at least one in your *Grab + Go* kit and spares if you can fit them in the other packs. You can even sew together old wool jumpers to make your blanket one-of-a-kind. Headlamps are luxuries while camping so we've thrown a couple of spares into each of our kits.

- * Essentials
- * Comfort



#28

Antiseptic cream, larger bottle of sanitizer, additional bar of soap, wipes, toilet paper, larger pack of laundry soap and tissues

Pack supplies you are familiar with especially those related to first aid and those that will come in contact with your skin, eyes or mouth. You don't want any surprises such as rashes or difficult scents. We have replaced most of our kit with multi-purpose organic soaps in bar form and creams that can be used for self-care as well as laundry.

* Essentials



#29

Lice comb, insect repellent, Stop Itch, tampons, menstrual cup, vitamin B complex, oil of oregano, nail clippers, tweezers and thermometer

I've never had lice but once our daughter goes to school this may become a reality. If you will be sleeping in an emergency relief centre it could well become yours too.

Go through your medicine cabinet and vanity to compile a list of essentials for you and yours. This is a good way to Marie Kondo your bathroom by putting spares in your kits and reducing the number of items to purchase. Over time you can replace or swap items.



#30

Emergency plan with task lists, list of phone numbers, addresses, account numbers and password reminders, USB's of photo albums and important documents, headphones and portable speaker

Who doesn't like a game of follow the leader disco? Headphones and speakers can let you tune-in or tune-out. You could bluetooth and transmit ABC 774 emergency news from your phone, your 'it's the end of the world' playlist or tune-out to some Enya. Whatever your fancy, these two items might not be essential but they might be your necessity in an emergency.

- * Essentials
- * Comfort
- * Community
- * Entertainment



#31

Machete/Saw

Try buying a machete in a pandemic panic period. I attempted to buy one during the panic spree prior to the Australian Covid-19 lockdown for a little home renovation project. Most places were SOLD OUT. Your guess is as good as mine as to why this was the case.

A machete is basically a larger multitool that can be used in a ‘camping’ sort of context to cut through bush and high grasses, and/or for simple shelter building.

* Add-on



#32

Photocopies of important documents, passports

It's likely that you will have more than one important documents folder. One that is for copies and one for originals. Keep the copies folder in your kit at all times and the originals one in an easily accessible space in case you need to grab it quickly. You don't want to be digging in the bottom of the drawers if an emergency service officer is standing at your front door telling you that you have five minutes to vacate your premises.



#33

Hotel soaps and shampoos, icepack, Magnoplasm, children's cold and fever medication, heavy duty bug roll on, children's mosquito cream, and shampoo bar

Additions. We are often adding and editing our emergency kits. There was the recent addition of magnoplasm after a camping trip - a miracle paste we discovered for removing splinters, glass and particles from under your skin. What we packed for an unknown disaster changed when our suburb had a chemical warehouse fire. It changed again with the 2019 bushfires and now the Covid-19 crisis. Every emergency and impact is different and therefore every response is different.

You can't plan for everything but there are some good basics for you to be READY, STEADY or GO.

- * Essentials
- * Add-ons