



# How to Act After an Earthquake

Once an earthquake starts, all you can do is position yourself in the safest place possible and hold on until the shaking is over. However, once the quake is over, there's a lot you can do to keep safe and to help others survive too.

## Steps

- 1 Check yourself for injuries.** Administer [first aid](#) or try to get help from others nearby if necessary. Once you've tended to yourself, check others in your immediate area for injury and administer first aid as needed.
  - Keep a special eye out for those who might not be able to help themselves, like the elderly, disabled, infants and children.
  - Regardless of age or infirmity, any person who is caught in debris is in danger of injury, shock and further damage from movement of building parts or aftershocks.
  - Don't move the severely injured unless it's absolutely necessary. Wait for [paramedics](#) or other people with knowledge to help. However, it is helpful to remain with someone for reassurance and comfort; stories of survivors in quake zones reveal that people who had their hands held or were spoken to constantly found greater strength to draw on to survive than those left alone.
- 2 Put on sturdy shoes, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and work gloves for protection against broken glass and debris.** If you're going to try to look for other people, be properly dressed and find a hard hat as well.
  - If you live and work in a quake-prone area, always have suitable walking shoes with you. Keep a pair at work and when going on outings; clambering over rough, liquefied or debris strewn ground in high heels, flip flops or bare feet is not going to be safe.
- 3 Evaluate your immediate location for safety.** If your immediate surroundings appear unsafe, move to a safer location. The following are some potential hazards to be aware of:
  - **Tsunami.** If you live in a coastal area, a strong earthquake might trigger a tsunami. Head for high ground once the shaking stops; don't wait for an alarm as it may not come in time, or at all. Simply assume it is a possibility; you can come down again, no harm done, if it doesn't eventuate but it's going to be a lot harder to gain lost time if a tsunami does arrive.
  - **Broken gas lines.** Smell for gas fumes and listen for the blowing or hissing noise that might signal a gas leak. If you suspect a gas leak, open a window and leave the location immediately. Turn the gas line off from the outside valve if possible, and call the utility company. Do not attempt to turn the gas back on by yourself, even if it's days afterward. Repair companies can take some time to reach your area.
  - **Electrical hazards.** Sparks, broken or frayed wires or the smell of burning insulation all signal an electrical problem and a fire hazard. Turn the electricity off at the main circuit breaker or fuse box. If you have to walk through water to get to the circuit breaker or fuse box, the Red Cross recommends calling an electrician for help because the water presents a possible electrocution hazard. Keep children and pets away from such any affected water bodies.
  - **Structural instability.** Look out for loose plaster, drywall, ceilings, beams, chimneys and staircases that might fall. Inspect windows, doors, staircases and flooring for signs of damage. In the case of external features, stand well away to inspect them as bricks, panels, glass, etc., might fall at any moment. Internally, do not use stairs or stand under anything likely to fall until you're sure that it's safe.
  - **Contaminated water.** Look and listen for signs of damaged water or sewer lines. Don't use the toilets if the sewer lines are damaged, and if you suspect the water lines are damaged, don't drink the tap water. The Federal Emergency Management Agency notes that you can melt ice cubes for safe drinking water. Hopefully you'll have already stored some fresh drinking water for just such an emergency.
  - **Hazardous chemicals.** Clean up hazardous spills that don't necessitate leaving the area immediately. Examples

include bleach, spilled medications and flammable liquids.

- Falling items. The contents of high shelves and cabinets can shift during earthquakes. Be careful when opening cabinet doors or pulling items off high shelves.

**4 Listen to an emergency radio or use a battery-powered television to receive the latest emergency information any instructions available.** There are also hand-crank radio and television models that require no other power source.

- Solar/battery powered or hand-crank radios should form part of your disaster readiness kit. Some of these devices will also charge your cell phone.

**5 Check your landline telephone for a dial tone, and your cellular phone for a signal.** Phone lines are frequently overburdened after a disaster; only use the telephones to report immediate, life-threatening emergency conditions. The Red Cross recommends placing a very quick call to the contact person designated in your earthquake disaster plan. This person can keep track of your status and location, and keep you updated about others that have checked in from the disaster area.

- If you can access Twitter, (or any social media site) it can be one very fast and useful way to send out a message that you're okay, to ask people to contact family members for you, to ask for accommodation or other help, etc.

**6 Stay out of and away from damaged buildings.** In particular, beware of chimneys, damaged walls, balconies and high placed signage or items hanging from the building that might fall on you. Post-earthquake hazards might not be immediately obvious as you're walking around; actively evaluate each new area for safety as you enter it by looking up as well as around you.

**7 Pay attention to aftershocks.** Large earthquakes are often followed by smaller quakes that may happen minutes, hours, days, or even months after the first large earthquake. Treat each aftershock as a fresh quake in terms of safety and reevaluate your surroundings for safety after every large one.

## Community Q&A

**There was a big earthquake of 6.9 in KPK, Pakistan. I live in Havelian City, a hilly area. What do I do in this situation?**



Go for the hills. Do not stay in the city during the aftermath, unless you have been trained for city combat. Any green plants such as grass, ferns etc. can be cooked in a small amount of water; it may not sound, taste, look or smell good, but it can be a lifesaving meal in dire times.

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## Tips

- Help those less fortunate than you if your home is not affected. People whose homes have been destroyed will need shelter; see if you can spare a room for a bit.
- The Red Cross recommends keeping your animals close and under control after an earthquake. This keeps them out of hazardous areas and allows you to monitor their behavior.
- Make sure you can get your earthquake kit. If its in the car or garage, it be buried in debris and you'll be unable to get to it. Outside away from buildings and secured from looters or animals is best.
- Don't run outside during an earthquake, get under a solid object like a table.
- Also - if you need corrective lenses to see - ALWAYS have your glasses (or a spare) within easy reach. When things are in rubble around you it is imperative to be able to see.
- If you prepared well beforehand, you'll be in a better position to take effective action after the quake. You should have a disaster kit ready, know basic first aid and have a well-rehearsed disaster plan in place with your loved ones.
- It's a good idea to have a "safe" person to contact that lives outside of your region, so if the phone lines are crazy - they can be the link from you to everyone else.

- If you are in bed when an earthquake hits, just roll over to the floor and stay beside the bed. Anything falling will get caught by the bed and will make a safe pyramid over you.
- If you must drive, be very careful. Look for damaged roadways and expect traffic signals to be out.
- Immediately fill the bathtub with water - this will work for a water source if you get desperate.

## Warnings

- Don't run or allow children to play in the rubble. Rubble is very unstable and can shift without warning, leaving gaping holes through which you can fall and more debris can collapse inward onto you. Warn anyone off rubble if you see them getting onto it.
- Get cuts, scratches and grazes treated. You might need a tetanus booster even if your wounds are superficial.

## Things You'll Need

- Emergency/disaster kit
- First aid kit or items
- Solid, safe, enclosed walking shoes
- Long clothes

## Sources and Citations

- <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/earthquake> – research source
- <https://www.ready.gov/earthquakes> - research source

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