Staying Healthy for Civil Disobedience Actions

General Preparation

When you get out

If you have a medical condition that could cause problems while you are being held, consider telling the police ahead of time.

If you have a medical problem before or during detention

The more you can anticipate and imagine possible scenarios ahead of time, the less likely you are to have long-term problems from stress and trauma.

Get training -- legal, “know your rights”, health and safety, nonviolence, civil disobedience, etc.

For more information

www.ncptsd.org/facts/general/fs_effects.htm a fact sheet on effects of trauma

www.bc.edu/bc_org/hvp/programs/stress/handout.html info on coping after a stressful event

students.washington.edu/afa/filecabinet/legal.html more arrest suggestions

www.nlg.org/wto/arrest.html#III issues

When you go to do civil disobedience, don’t carry anything you can’t replace or anything you don’t want the police to see. They can, and probably will, search your bags and pockets.

www.action-medical.net street medic site with lots of good information on plastic handcuffs and other health

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If you use personal assistance devices such as canes and braces, consider bringing them (and a doctor’s note saying you need them). It’s better to have them and not need them than be without.

Even if you don’t feel terribly stressed you may have nightmares, a short temper or other reactions to your experience. This is normal, and may also be a sign that you could benefit from some more formal processing of your experience.

Consider carrying enough cash or a credit card to pay the standard fine/bail bond person fee for a misdemeanor in your area. A legal support person (someone trained in legal assistance for activists) should be able to tell you the usual fee.

Consider carrying with you: water, food (nuts, carrots, energy bars), extra clothes (protection against cold tile floors, a good pillow, etc.), a rain poncho.

Don’t go through this alone! If your regular friends aren’t sympathetic, find fellow activists or groups that can help. Some medics are trained in counseling, or you can call the International Critical Incident Stress Hotline at 410-750-9600.

Try and be gentle with yourself. Sleep (after talking), eat healthy food, relax, get friends to give you massages, indulge, BUT avoid alcohol, tobacco and other drugs as much as possible.

Decide on whether you want to give the police your true name or practice jail solidarity (see www.indybay.org/news/2001/03/2218.php for info on solidarity). If you plan to give your name have a government issued ID with you.

If police are abusive in any way (emotional, physical, violating your rights, etc.) note the officer’s name and badge number. Try to remember as many specific details of the event as you can. If you have a pen, write it all down!

If possible, arrange for a support person for AFTER the action -- someone who can look after your emotional health, give you massages and do whatever else helps you feel safe and cared for.

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Initially keep asking until help arrives. Consider using chanting or other group tactics to get the police to respond.

Talk with people who have done similar actions in your area. Find out how they were treated by the police, the courts, the media, the activist community, etc.

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Think about what good can come of your arrest. Can you do a skill-share with your cell mates? Learn new songs?

Remember, police lie and manipulate. They will tell you things that aren’t true (that your friends have blamed you and are getting out, that you’ll get out in an hour, etc.).

While you are detained

Stay as calm as you can. The police may try to unnerve, dehumanize and generally stress you out. Try yoga, singing, meditation, sharing stories with fellow detainees, etc.

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Plastic cuffs have caused some people long-term nerve damage. If you have pain, numbness or tingling in your hands at any time, have these symptoms documented and see a doctor.

If police are abusive in any way (emotional, physical, violating your rights, etc.) note the officer’s name and badge number. Try to remember as many specific details of the event as you can. If you have a pen, write it all down!

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