

### *Injury aftercare*

There are numerous herbal remedies for injuries that help the body to heal faster with less residual damage. The following can be used for a wide variety of injuries such as cuts, scrapes, bruises, sprains and strains:

Mix equal parts:

St Johns Wort flowers (*Hypericum perforatum*) reduces bruising & nerve damage

Calendula flowers (*Calendula officinalis*) promotes healing, reduces inflammation

Yarrow flowers (*Achillea millefolium*) good for open wounds, promotes healing

You can use these in several ways. The blend is a nice combo but don't hesitate to use just one herb if that is all you can find. These can be applied immediately after injury and later as needed.

As a tea:

Strain well and apply externally frequently as a wash out of a bottle or a spritzer; or dip a clean cloth in the tea and hold or tape it to the area for 1/2 hour, 1-3 times daily. Will keep unrefridgerated for about 24 hours.

As a tincture:

For small injuries apply a dropper directly to affected area. For larger areas dilute a spoonful in 1/4 - 1/2 cup water and apply as a wash or on a cloth. Tinctures contain alcohol. They will burn open wounds. If someone has just been assaulted they may react strongly if caused more pain.

As an oil:

Don't use oils at demos since it can hold chemical weapons on your skin. Once you are home oils are helpful externally since they are easy to spread over a large area.

Internally:

If you have some experience with herbs you may choose to also use these internally. Tea 1-2 cups a day. Tincture 1-3 dropperfuls 2-3 times a day.

**In general, rest up, take good care of yourself, and seek help if physical or emotional symptoms last longer than you think they should. If you do see a health care provider, keeping a copy of your medical records and symptoms may be useful in the future, if you plan to take legal action against the police.**

We hope that this information helps you to be safer and stronger in your activism. Remember that we do this work because it is important and fun — and at least some danger is essential to life.

We are prepared to discuss first aid for demonstrations or other health care issues with any interested activists or groups. While we do trainings outside of Portland, we are also happy to try to put groups in contact with local health care workers.

If you have any questions, comments, or donations, you can contact us at:  
P.O.Box 11303 Portland,OR 97211 or email [info@blackcrosscollective.org](mailto:info@blackcrosscollective.org)

# An Activist's Guide to Basic First Aid

version 1.1



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- Lung support:  
A tincture of Mullein leaf (*Verbascum thapsus*) is excellent lung support. This should especially be used if you are asthmatic or have a cough. You can take two to four dropperfuls, every four hours or so, immediately following exposure. After a day, decrease this to two dropperfuls four times a day. Chewing on the root of a licorice plant (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) is also very helpful for your lungs, as are Slippery Elm tablets or capsules of Marshmallow root powder (*Althea officinalis*). These mucilaginous herbs all soothe and coat mucous membranes. These are especially important if you have a dry cough.
- High fiber diet:  
Whole grains or psyllium husk can help clean you out your colon . Always take psyllium with at least two cups of water. Discontinue if irritation or gas occurs.
- Epsom salt rub:  
A hot shower, followed by a thorough scrubbing with epsom salts which are then left on the skin for 10-15 minutes before a thorough follow-up wash can help draw toxins from the body. Be sure to accompany this with much water consumption.
- Nettle tea:  
Nettles are the perfect all around support plants. Their high mineral content and mild cleansing action supports many body functions. Drinking lots of nettle tea will boost your immune system, calm you down and support your body in returning to its regular, strong self.

### Emotional Aftercare:

Some people hold stress in their bodies following demos. This can show up as disturbed sleep, nightmares, anxiety, fear or depression. It can also trigger underlying stress from past events.

A good formula for supporting the nerves and relieving stress is equal parts:

- Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)
- Lavender (*Lavandula spp.*)
- Oatstraw (*Avena sativa*)

Dosage during times of acute stress attacks is 4 dropperfuls of tincture (an alcohol extraction) taken with a small amount of water. You can wait 15 minutes - 1/2 hour and take half the original dose again if needed. As a tonic during times of stress to help keep you calm you can take 1-2 droppers 1-2 times a day, or drink 1-2 cups of the tea (about 1 – 2 Tablespoons per cup).

It is common to experience nightmares and/or disturbed sleep after a demo. If this is the case for you the above tonic blend may be helpful, or try tincture of Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) to help ensure a deeper sleep and to help stave off nightmares. Dosage is 1-3 dropperfuls at bedtime. The tea works but drinking a cup of tea before you go to bed is a good way to ensure a full bladder at some point in the night.

Other things you may want to try for stress, grief, anxiety or frayed nerves following a demo include: Rescue Remedy (a flower essence), yoga, meditation, and talking to friends about your experiences/thoughts at the demo. The flowers of Borage (*Borago officinalis*) can be taken as a tincture (one dropperful as needed) or tea to help get your emotional strength back. Lavender essential oil is especially helpful for panic attacks or grief. Keep a bottle handy to smell throughout the day.

# Aftercare

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The physical and emotional effects of the demo may stick around in our bodies after the actual demo has ended. In the hours, days and weeks following the protest, it is important to remember that longer lasting effects can exist. These effects may be physical, related to pepper spray, tear gas or injury, and they may be emotional, related to the really intense environment surrounding us.

First, a note about using herbs: generally the following herbal suggestions are safe. However consult an experienced herbalist if you are pregnant, have a serious medical condition, or are on medications. Discontinue if you have any negative or allergic reaction, symptoms get worse or the condition does not improve. These suggestions are for education and empowerment. They are not meant to override common sense or to replace a practitioners care if needed. The herbal and homeopathic remedies mentioned in this 'zine should be easily attainable from a local health food store as singles, however you may have to combine them into the formula yourself.

## *Chemical Weapons Aftercare:*

Over-exposure to “incapacitating agents” such as tear gas and/or pepper spray may potentially lead to lingering health problems. These agents may be able to damage the protective lining of the lungs, which can make us more susceptible to lung infections and diseases. Additionally, the toxins from the chemical weapons can stick around in our bodies, taxing our liver and our general immune system. There are many steps you can take to help decrease your risks from exposure to these toxins. Some of these steps need to be taken as soon as possible following exposure. Others should be done regularly over the weeks after exposure.

Try not to bring contaminated clothing indoors unless it is wrapped up in a plastic bag. As soon as you can, wash your hair and all contaminated clothing in a strong detergent.

It is important to help your body to eliminate the toxins as quickly and effectively as possible, in order to minimize long term effects. The following is a list of things you can do to help detoxify and support your immune system following chemical weapons exposure:

- Water:

Try to drink at least 2 liters a day. Squeeze some lemon in the water for added benefit.

- Liver support:

Use bitter, liver tonic herbs such as Milk Thistle seeds (*Silybum marianum*), Burdock root (*Arctium lappa*), and Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) for about two weeks following exposure. They can be used as tea, 1- 4 cups a day, or as a tincture 2-4 dropperfuls 2-3 times a day, or powder the herbs in a coffee grinder, place them in capsules and use 4 capsules 1-3 times a day. Milk Thistle can often be purchased pre-encapsulated.

Your liver must work overtime to filter out the toxins. Avoiding alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, fried or high fat foods will make its job easier. Getting regular sleep is also important— your liver continues to work while you sleep.

Welcome to our 'zine!

Black Cross Health Collective is an affinity group of health care workers who live in Portland, Oregon. We formed after the WTO protests because we saw a need for medical care that is specific to the radical community. We think our needs as radicals are different, and that groups like the Red Cross don't give us the skills we need to keep ourselves and each other safe in the streets. So we called upon our own medical experience (as nurse practitioners, nurses, EMT's, clinical herbalists, and more), as well as our experience in demos and direct actions, and formed Black Cross. Since then, we've done first aid trainings in Portland and around the country, provided medical support at local and national demos, and are conducting trials looking for a way to neutralize pepper spray.

We believe that health care is political. The kind of care we do or don't receive, where and how we receive that care, who provides that care, who has access to training to provide care, and what kinds of trainings are smiled or frowned upon, all involve inherently political issues. We believe the system needs to be changed... the health care system right along with all the others.

We've put this zine together mostly to go along with a first aid training. While doing the trainings we realized there was way more to say about first aid than we would have time to say it in. So we thought a little reading would maybe be helpful to y'all.

Remember the most important words you can ever learn to say are “I don't know.”



Fight the power, do no harm.

- Black Cross Health Collective

# Protest Fashion



## What to Wear

- comfortable, protective shoes that you can run in
- clothing covering all your skin to protect from sun and pepper spray exposure.
- shatter-resistant eye protection (i.e. sunglasses, swim goggles, or gas mask)
- zip-lock with bandana soaked in cider vinegar (water if nothing else). It can aid in breathing during chemical exposure
- weather-related gear (i.e. rain gear or sun hat)
- heavy-duty gloves if you plan to handle hot tear gas canisters
- fresh clothes in plastic bag (in case yours get contaminated by chemical weapons)
- a cap or a hat to protect you from the sun and from chemical weapons

## What to Bring

- lots of water in a plastic bottle with sport-top, to drink and to wash off your skin or eyes, if needed
- energy snacks
- identification and/or emergency contact information ONLY if you want to be cited out of jail in the event of arrest
- just enough money for pay-phone, food, transportation
- watch, paper, pen for accurate documentation of events, police brutality, injuries
- water- or alcohol-based sunscreen
- inhaler, epipen, insulin or other meds if applicable
- several days of prescription medication and doctor's note in case of arrest

Afterward, remove contaminated clothing and take a shower in the coldest water you can stand. Wash your clothes with strong detergents as soon as you are able. This shit is toxic, and will continually contaminate you and everyone around you until you get rid of it. Until then, try not to touch your eyes or your face, or other people, furniture, carpets etc. to avoid further contamination.

**Remember, it is only temporary,  
and we are extremely strong.**

### Gas Masks

The best protection against chemical weapons is a gas mask. There are several important factors to consider when looking for a gas mask. Shatter-proof lenses are important. For convenience, look for a mask that uses standard NATO filters. Try it on to check for limited visibility, comfort, ease of use, etc. and be sure to practice with it before you're in the streets fumbling with unfamiliar straps.

When paired with goggles, respirators make an excellent alternative to gas masks. It is necessary to do some homework beforehand and find goggles that don't fog up and that fit tightly on your face with the respirator. Respirators can be purchased at safety supply stores. Ask for filters for organic chemicals, and tell the clerk what you're filtering to doublecheck. Costs between \$18-24.

A bandana soaked in apple cider vinegar (water if nothing else) and tied tightly around the nose and mouth is a last resort. It is far better than nothing, but is not going to do much for long-term protection, and multiple uses will render it as gassy as the air around you.

Shatterproof swim goggles work reasonably well to protect against pepper spray exposure. Most goggles have air holes to prevent fogging - fill these with epoxy. Covering the holes with duct tape can work against an initial attack, though not for long term protection. Try them on with your respirator or bandana to ensure that they are compatible. Note that swim goggles generally do not provide an adequate seal against tear gas.

### **Protection:**

- Avoid the use of oils and lotions because they seem to "trap" the chemicals and thereby prolong exposure.
- We recommend using a water or alcohol-based sunscreen (rather than oil-based). If your choice is between oil-based or nothing, we advocate using the sunscreen. Pepper spray on top of sunburn is not good.
- We also recommend minimizing skin exposure by covering up as much as possible. This can also protect you from the sun, as can a hat.
- Gas masks provide the best facial protection, if properly fitted and sealed. Alternatively, goggles (with shatter-proof lenses), respirators, even a wet bandana over the nose and mouth will help.

### **How to deal:**

- STAY CALM. Panicking increases the irritation. Breathe slowly and remember it is only temporary.
- If you see it coming or get a warning, put on protective gear, if able, try to move away or get upwind.
- Blow your nose, rinse your mouth, cough and spit. Try not to swallow.
- If you wear contacts, try to remove the lenses or get someone to remove them for you, with CLEAN, uncontaminated fingers.
- DO NOT RUB IT IN.

### **Remedies:**

We have been doing trials with pepper spray to find good remedies. There are some things that you can do after being sprayed to help minimize the discomfort. None of these are miracle cures: using these remedies will help people to feel better faster, but it will still take time.

- For the eyes and mouth:

We recommend an eye flush using a solution of half liquid antacid (Maalox) and half water.

A bottle with a squirt cap is ideal for the eye flush. Always irrigate from the inside corner of the eye towards the outside, with head tilted back and slightly towards the side being rinsed. It needs to get into the eye to help. You may need to help open the victims' eye for them - they most likely won't be able/ willing to open it themselves, and opening will cause a temporary increase in pain, but it does help.

This works great as a mouth rinse too, as long as the victim is alert and breathing normally. Spit it out after rinsing.

- For the skin:

We recommend treating small areas at a time with MOFIBA (mineral oil followed immediately by alcohol)

**Caution: in order to perform this procedure correctly, you need to be trained. If done improperly, harm can be done. Carefully avoid the eyes at all times.**

- menstrual pads, if needed. Avoid using tampons — if you're arrested you may not have a chance to change it (tampons left in more than six hours increase your risk of developing toxic shock syndrome)

## **WHAT NOT TO DO**

- **Don't** put vaseline, mineral oil, oil-based sunscreen or moisturizers on skin as they "trap" chemicals.
- **Don't** wear contact lenses, which can trap irritating chemicals underneath.
- **Don't** wear things which can easily be grabbed (i.e. dangly earrings or other jewelry, ties, loose hair).
- **Don't** go to the demo alone, if you can help it. It is best to go with an affinity group or some friends who know you well.
- **Don't** forget to eat food and **DRINK LOTS OF WATER.**

## **Medication in Jail**



If you take medication for any health condition that might pose serious problems if your medication were to be interrupted (such as: behavioral disorders, HIV, diabetes, hypertension), you should be aware that you may not have access to proper medication while you are in jail. A letter from a doctor will help. Three copies of the letter are needed, one for the legal team, one for the medical team (these will be kept completely confidential) and one for you. It should include the following information: your name, diagnosis, that you must have access at all times to your medication, a list of all meds that you require, a statement that you must be allowed to keep meds on your person so that they can be properly administered, and that no substitutions are acceptable. Since your name will be on the document, you may want to hide it on your body as a sort of insurance policy — perhaps you won't need it and then could eat it and participate in jail solidarity tactics, but perhaps you'll be worn out already at the time of arrest and will want to cite out in order to take care of yourself.

## Meds, continued

Better to cite out than pass out. Your meds will need to be in their original prescription bottle in order for you to keep them, but you also could conceal an emergency supply on your person if you want.

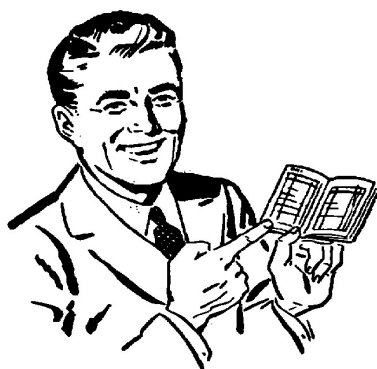
Another option to greater ensure your ability to participate in solidarity is to have the document as described above but with a photo of yourself rather than your name. Your prescription bottle would then need to have your name cut out of the label, while leaving the rest of the label intact.

Please make sure that your affinity group and the legal team is aware of your needs so they can help care and advocate for you.

- coughing and difficulty breathing
- disorientation, confusion and sometimes panic
- Some people report feeling intense anger. This can be useful if you are prepared and able to focus it towards recovery and returning to the action.

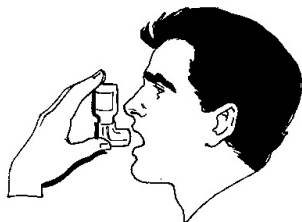
The good news is that the effects are temporary. Discomfort from tear gas usually disappears after 5-30 minutes, while the worst pepper spray discomfort may take 20 minutes to 2 hours to subside. The effects of both diminish sooner with treatment. Because pepper spray penetrates to the nerve endings, its effects may last for hours after removal from the skin.

**There are many myths about treatment and prevention. Much of this misinformation is potentially dangerous. Some of it, if applied, could greatly increase or prolong a person's reaction to exposure, or at the very least provide a false sense of security.**



## Medical Conditions You May See During a Demo

Medical Condition	Symptoms	Action/Your role
Asthma: inflammation and constriction of lungs, accompanied by fluid production in the lungs	Wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, cough	This person needs an inhaler. You can ask the person if they have an inhaler and encourage them to use it, and you can find a medic.



### Prevention:

For most healthy people, the effects of tear gas and pepper spray are temporary. However, for some people the effects can be long-lasting and life-threatening. People with the conditions listed below should be aware of these risks and may want to try and avoid exposure. Please be aware that in intense actions, police behavior can be unpredictable, and avoidance is not always possible.

- Folks with respiratory diseases, such as asthma, emphysema, etc. risk exacerbation or permanent damage if exposed.
- Vulnerable people such as infants, the elderly, and the immune compromised, risk intensified and possibly life-threatening responses.
- Anyone with chronic health conditions or those on medications that weaken the immune system, (ie: chemotherapy, Lupus, HIV, radiation, or long-term corticosteroids such as prednisone) risk exacerbation of illness, intensified response and possible delayed recovery.
- Women who are or could be pregnant, or who are trying to get pregnant may be at risk of spontaneous abortion or increased risk of birth defects.
- Nursing mothers risk passing toxins on to their infant.
- Folks with skin (ie: severe acne, psoriasis, or eczema) and eye (ie: conjunctivitis or uveitis) conditions risk an intensified response.
- People wearing contact lenses may experience increased eye irritation and damage due to chemicals being trapped under the lenses.

# Pepper Spray and Tear Gas

The first thing to remember about exposure to these chemical weapons is that it is not the worst thing that could happen to you. The hype and fear surrounding them is enormous, but in reality, if you are careful and smart, you should survive it with little problem. This information is the result of conversations with experts, pepper spray trials done by the *Black Cross*, and our combined experiences of treating thousands of people in various actions, including the WTO in Seattle, and the IMF/WB in DC.

## What They Are:

Tear gas (also called CS, CN, or CX) and pepper spray (OC) are chemical compounds that are weapons designed to be used by the military and police to disperse crowds and subdue individuals. They are mucous membrane (the inside of your mouth and nose, among other places, are lined with mucus membrane) and skin irritants. They are mixed with solvents, and delivered through the use of propellants. Some people think some of these can cause cancer, birth defects and genetic mutations. In Seattle, one batch of tear gas contained methylene chloride, a highly toxic solvent which can cause mental confusion, headache, tingling of the limbs, rapid heartbeat, visual and auditory hallucinations, menstruation cycle disruption, spontaneous abortion, and varying effects on lungs and the digestive system.

## How They Are Deployed:

Tear gas and pepper spray can be sprayed from small hand-held dispensers or large fire-extinguisher size tanks. Tear gas is most commonly deployed via canisters, which are fired into crowds, sometimes directly at people. Don't pick up the canisters without gloves as they are extremely hot. Be aware that the time it takes you to throw it will allow you to be heavily exposed.

## How They Affect You:

Both tear gas and pepper spray are skin irritants, causing burning pain and excess drainage from eyes, nose, mouth and breathing passages. Pepper spray is more popular with authorities as an agent of control because of its immediate pain-causing qualities. It is harder to remove from the skin and has the capacity to cause first degree burns. If you are exposed to either, you may experience:

- stinging, burning in your eyes, nose, mouth and skin
- excessive tearing, causing your vision to blur
- runny nose
- increased salivation

Medical Condition	Symptoms	Action/Your role
Diabetes: a disease process that affects the body's ability to metabolize sugar.	Most of the time people with diabetes take good care of themselves, but there are diabetic emergencies to watch for. Symptoms include disorientation, restlessness, combativeness, fatigue, slurred speech (people experiencing a diabetic emergency have often been mistaken for drunk), unconsciousness, coma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a medic.</li> <li>• If the person is conscious and coherent, get them a little something sweet to eat or drink (i.e. small amount of juice, piece of candy). If the crisis is due to low blood sugar this small quantity of sugar might bring them out of it. If it is due to high blood sugar, the small additional amount of sugar is not going to worsen the situation.</li> </ul>
Anaphylactic shock: a life-threatening allergic reaction from bee stings, foods such as peanuts, strawberries, etc.	Can kill someone in a few minutes because of swelling in the throat Can see swelling of face, hands, and other body parts, throat may itch or feel tight, a rash may have preceded the swelling or may accompany it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get this person to emergency medical care immediately. They need medication to counter the reaction (an "epi-pen" which they might be carrying) and possibly respiratory support.</li> </ul>
Heart Attack:	Chest pain that may go up into the neck or jaw, shoulder or left arm, and/ or down to the stomach, pain may be crushing or burning, they may be sweating, feel nauseated and may vomit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get a medic. Get them to a hospital. Give them one aspirin with a little water if they can chew it safely.</li> <li>Be ready to perform CPR.</li> </ul>

## Seizures/Epilepsy

Person falls to the ground, arms and legs may shake or go rigid, eyes roll back, may pee or shit in clothes, clench jaw. Sometimes the individual will have a 'feeling' or warning, sometimes there will be none. After seizure, person may be disoriented, sleepy, frothing at the mouth, emotional.

- Get a medic. Prolonged or repeated seizures are life-threatening emergencies similar to shock. Don't wait for it to stop, send for assistance.
- Clear the area and gently support the head to prevent injury, but do not intervene, do not insert anything into their mouth or restrain them.
- After the shaking stops, turn the person on their side in case they vomit. They may be sleepy disoriented, or combative. These conditions may persist for a long time - up to hours. Find out from the person if they have seized before. If they have a history of seizures and they know how to take care of themselves, support them in whatever they want to do for themselves.
- If they tell you they have never had a seizure before, then they need to get medical evaluation immediately, especially if they tell you the seizure was preceded by a head injury of any kind.

## Heat Stroke

This is the big serious thing. If you even guess this is what somebody has you need to get them to a hospital as soon as you can.

They'll be:

- Not sweating (this is the way to tell the two apart)
- Exhausted, as opposed to just tired
- Their skin will be hot, flushed and dry (as opposed to the clammy skin of a heat exhausted person)
- They may be confused or disoriented
- Small pupils

What to do:

This is an emergency. People can go into a coma and die from heat stroke. Get help immediately!

## The best medicine is prevention!

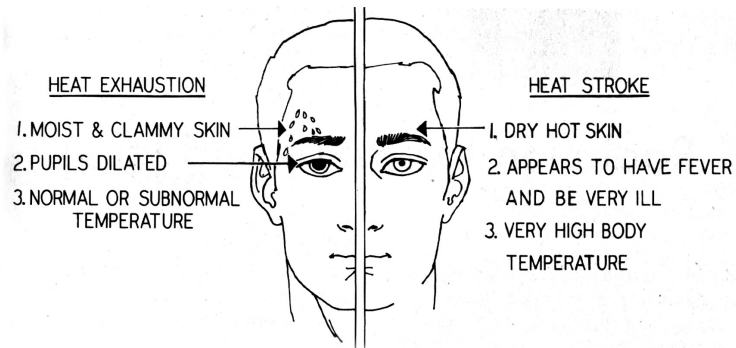
- Drink a lot of water
- Don't forget to eat — even a snack provides some of the nutrients you need
- Avoid excessive exposure to the sun with water- or alcohol- based sunscreen, clothing that covers your skin, and a wide-brimmed hat.
- Pay special attention to kids, older folks, people who are sick with things like HIV, and also people who have been drinking alcohol. They can more easily be made sick by the heat.



## Heat Problems

People can get real sick and even die from over-exposure to the sun. Some things can be dealt with on the streets, others require that the person who's sick get to a clinic or emergency room ASAP. If you're not sure, it's always safer to decide they need to be sent to the clinic or seen by a trained medic than to think you can deal with it yourself.

In general there are two types of serious heat sickness: *heat exhaustion* and *heat stroke*. People can also get really painful muscle cramps from the heat, which is a real good sign that they need to cool off.



### Heat Exhaustion

This condition is less serious than heat stroke. Symptoms can include:

- fatigue
- cool, clammy skin
- weakness
- dizziness
- nausea, diarrhea or vomiting
- headaches or muscle cramps
- sweating
- big pupils
- sunburned skin

If you think this is heat exhaustion and not heat stroke:

- Move them to somewhere cool and out of the way of the action
- Give drinks that are non-carbonated and without caffeine. Something like Emergen-C is great. Water mixed with sugar and a little salt, or water and a salty snack is ok too if that's what you've got. The idea is that not just water but also minerals need to be replaced
- Try to cool them off however you can (ice is great, soaking their clothes in cool water is good too)
- If they don't feel better within 15 minutes go and get help. It doesn't take long for heat exhaustion to turn into heat stroke.

Medical Condition	Symptoms	Action/Your role
Shock: There are many different causes of shock, but the basic problem is that the person is experiencing fluid or blood loss. This could be internal (blunt trauma) or external (open wound) blood loss.	Restlessness and anxiety may be the first sign, skin becomes cold and wet, face may become pale and may later become blue around the mouth, breathing may be shallow, labored or irregular.	Get help! Stop any obvious bleeding by applying firm pressure directly over the wound. Raise legs slightly above the heart. If the victim is alert and can swallow, water may help restore vital blood pressure.
Head injury: If you see someone experience a head injury, consider it a big deal.	At first a person may seem fine, so don't be fooled. Internal bleeding and brain swelling can happen slowly, so symptoms of a serious life-threatening injury may appear gradually. Symptoms may also appear quickly.  *nausea *vomiting *decreasing level of consciousness (victim forgets where he/she is, what they are doing there, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get a medic. Make sure that the person gets medical attention even if they think they are okay.</li> <li>• If the person is on the ground, don't move them. Clear the area to prevent the injured person from further harm. Head injuries may also involve neck injuries, so if at all possible, don't move them.</li> <li>• If you can, try to locate someone who knows the injured person. They will be able to help you figure out if they are acting like their normal self.</li> <li>• Keep talking to them so that you can tell if there is a change in their mental function over time.</li> <li>• Try to get a medical history so that the information will be available if they should lose consciousness.</li> </ul>

# Complicating Conditions

## Psychiatric Conditions



Working with people who look like they're crazy can be really hard for a lot of us. Some of us have had bad experiences in the past with "crazy" people. Some of us have had no experience whatsoever with "crazy" people. And some of us have been labeled as being "crazy" ourselves. It can be scary to encounter someone who seems to not be living in your reality, because they can be unpredictable and it is harder to read them. They could potentially be a danger to themselves or to the crowd. Our goal should be to help them to be safe, while keeping everyone around them, including ourselves, safe.

First off, if you encounter someone in the streets who is acting in a weird way and may be a danger to him/herself, or to the crowd, take a big deep breath. Try as hard as you can to stay calm. Fear and anger can be contagious and they won't help with psychiatric issues.

Next you need to ask a few questions:

- *Is this person sharing your reality?*

You will interact differently with someone who's in your reality than someone who isn't. Are they talking about/perceiving things that you aren't? Try asking them these questions to figure this out.

- What's your name?
- What month and year is it?
- Where are we?
- What are we doing here?

Their answers should give you a clue as to whether or not they're in your reality. The most common reasons we will see for folks seeming to be in different realities are:

- Head injury
- Withdrawal from drugs or alcohol
- Stopped taking psych meds that they're usually taking

- *Does this person have a head injury?*

This is a very important question to ask. If they do have a head injury, they could die. And some serious head injuries can really make someone seem like they are crazy.

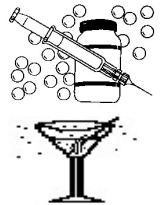


- Did someone see a fall/ whack to the head?
- Are there any obvious signs (bruises, blood etc. )?
- Is there someone around who can do a neurological exam?  
(This information could be really helpful.)
- Does someone around know this person and how they usually act? Is this really different than their usual personality?

Don't assume that this person is "just" crazy, drunk or stoned. A head injury is something you do not want to miss. Besides, crazy drunk and stoned folks are real likely to get head injuries and need good care too. If you think they might have a head injury **THEY NEED TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL**. It's way better to accidentally send a crazy person to the hospital than to accidentally not send a head injured one.

- *Is this person withdrawing from drugs or alcohol?*

This can be a really scary situation as well. Withdrawal is no fun and can cause all sorts of crazy looking behavior. It can also cause some serious medical stuff, like seizures. A demo is not a good place for this person to be. And they may really benefit from medical care. Help this person to get out of the demonstration area and into a calmer environment, where they will be safe. Medications can be given to help people get through withdrawal safely. Consider helping to get this person to a friendly clinic.



- *Does this person normally live in a different reality?*

If so, do they usually take psychiatric medication for schizophrenia or something like that? It is not at all uncommon for people who are really pretty out there to be able to come back down to your planet to tell you that they are psychotic, do take medication, have a regular doctor, etc. Don't be afraid to ask this person specific questions. If they have friends around, ask them as well. This is probably another situation where this person would be much better off not being at the demo. Help them to get to a safe, quiet area. And help them to get to their medication or to their doctor, if it is appropriate.