Looking after your health on actions

On an action/demo you are likely to be outside for long periods, probably without access to amenities, so you need to be prepared to look after yourself and your mates for quite a while.

Going to an action with a friend or an affinity group of friends is always safer. Try to get extra (or at least a reasonable amount of) sleep before the event and plan on needing some recovery time afterwards.

This guide is sourced from the Action Medics' guide to preparing for protests, which is no longer available online. This Zine from the Black Cross Health Collective also includes useful information on looking after your health on actions. QueerCare can offer first aid and care, as well as trainings, for your action.

1. What to wear
2. Water and Food
3. Medical Issues
4. Offensive weapons and sprays
5. Calling backup help

You might also want to read our guide on after-action Emotional and Trauma Support

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1. What to Wear

Wear a sunhat/head covering. And wear suncream – though try to use water or alcohol based suncream (and lotions and insect repellent and make up!) Most suncreams are fat based, and tear gas is soluble in fat and may cause burns.

Wear lots of thin layers for flexibility. These can be combined and are warmer than a thick jumper. Layers can be changed for security reasons or if you are contaminated with CS gas. (Bear in mind that CS gas sticks to fleeces). Layers can be taken off if you get too hot.

Take a waterproof layer and try to choose fabrics that are quick drying. Fabrics like cotton and particularly denim stay wet for a long time and could make you very cold and uncomfortable.

Bring Spare glasses/contact lenses. Consider wearing different glasses to your normal ones.

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2. Water and Food

You should always carry water and food for yourself.

You should drink at least 2 litres of water in a normal day and more during periods of intense activity. If you can, carry extra water for other dehydrated people and for eye flushes if CS gas is used.

Preferably carry your water in cycling type water bottles (the ones that are squeezy with pop up tops) as these can be used for eye flushes (to treat CS gas).

Make sure you eat regularly as in adrenalin fuelled situations your blood sugar can get low, making you disorientated and a danger to yourself and others. Take food for yourself for the day. Also take emergency sugar rations eg. flapjacks, mars bars, kendal mint cake etc.

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3. Medical Issues

If you have any medical issues such as asthma, epilepsy, diabetes, pregnancy, heart problems, (even if they have not occurred recently), then:

- **Tell your mates.**

- Carry any emergency medication you may require, eg insulin, inhaler. Even if you have not had a problem for a long time.
- It would be useful if you wore a small wristband with medical issues written on it, because it makes it easier for medics to treat you.

In Custody

You have a right to your regular medication in custody, and to see a doctor if you are feeling unwell. You can learn more about what happens in custody in our guide to arrest.

Mental Health Issues in Custody

Some of the questions you will be asked when you are booked in at the station will concern your physical and mental health (including whether you have a history of self-harm). The stated purpose of these questions is to ascertain whether you have any disabilities and/or pre-existing health conditions which may put you at risk while you are in custody.

It is important to realise that if you tell the officer booking you in that you do have mental health problems and/or a history of self-harm OR answer no comment to those questions, the police are very likely to regularly check up on you when you are placed in a cell. This can be unpleasant and seriously disrupt any attempts at sleep.

If you think you are likely to be arrested on a demonstration, it is worth considering how you will deal with this. Our recommendation is to do whatever makes you feel safest.

4. Offensive Weapons and Sprays

Padding for Offensive Weapon Protection

Padding anywhere is up to individuals. If padding is used, the priority areas should be the soft tissue of tummy, lower back and groin. These areas contain vital organs, do not have bones protecting them, and the police are trained to aim for these areas.

CS Gas and Pepper Spray Preparation

Bring spare contact lenses/glasses. It is important to get contact lenses out if you are exposed to CS gas or pepper spray as CS gas can get trapped behind the lenses and burn your eye – if contacts are not removed, the end result could be blindness. Contact lenses worn in CS gas are contaminated and must be thrown away.

Carry more than one pair of well fitting swimming goggles with shatter proof lenses and change them regularly in a CS gas contaminated environment. Prescription swimming goggles are available.

Carry vinegar/lemon juice soaked bandanas in sealable plastic bags – effective for short periods against breathing CS gas, or a small bottle of lemon juice/vinegar to apply at scene. We recommend apple cider vinegar – it is not pleasant to breathe malt vinegar.

We do not recommend gas masks they are expensive, only effective for short periods, can be confiscated and usually have glass/plastic that can shatter.

5. Calling Backup Help

You can never deal with everything, so you need to know when you need help, and how to get it.

On demonstrations phone the medical support number or get the attention of the nearest medic. If the situation is really serious call 999 and ask for an ambulance. Wait with the person and reassure them. Calming has real physical and psychological impacts on recovery.