

You are a human being.

It is very easy to forget that you have basic human needs in the middle of this extraordinary public health crisis. Airline attendants tell us that, if we are sitting next to a vulnerable person in the event of an emergency, we have to put our own oxygen masks on first. If we don't, we won't be able to help that person through the rest of the crisis.

In southeast Texas, the oxygen masks have dropped. You are caring for the most vulnerable members of our community. You have to make sure you are getting oxygen, and that you continue to get it. Our lives depend on you remaining a healthy, functioning human being.

THIS IS WHAT YOU NEED

SLEEP

We all need AT LEAST seven hours of sleep per day. Full stop. This is a crisis, and the demands on your time are extraordinary. But sleep cannot be compromised. In one famous recent study, people who had only gotten four hours of sleep in a 24-hour period made as many driving errors as those who were legally drunk. And these effects grow in intensity over time.

NOURISHMENT

In a crisis, it is very easy for our relationship with food to be disrupted. Take a moment to reflect on how you normally eat, and remain attentive to the ways those patterns change. Do not allow yourself to skip meals, and notice when you are eating because it is the quickest way to change how you are feeling.

MOVEMENT

Our bodies are built for movement. The Bushpeople of the Kalahari walk 20 miles a day. None of us are likely to get in that much movement, especially in this crisis. But steal moments to stretch, walk, climb stairs, run. It is one of the very best treatments for anxiety and depression.

RELATEDNESS

We need connection. When we are in a crisis, we can tend to isolate. We may want to protect our loved ones from our experiences. We may become preoccupied or prioritize work over our normal patterns of connecting. Reflect on what's normal for you, and notice how you are departing from normal. Let loved ones know that this is a period of intense demand in your life. Risk asking for help when you are struggling. And make time -- even if it is just a few minutes -- to talk about something other than the work.

MEANING AND PURPOSE

You would not be here now if you did not have a strong sense of purpose. Research shows that people who understand their purpose in terms of service to others are healthier and happier. Remind yourself why you are doing this work. But it is not the only answer. It is surprisingly common for people to report high satisfaction in their service work AND to suddenly stop functioning (burnout).

Remember: you are not a superhero. You are a human being. You are part of a team that is working to solve a problem that is far greater than any one of us. Your sphere of control is human-sized, and so is your sphere of responsibility. Reach out for help when you need it. You are not alone.