Assignments take us away from our families, friends, routines, pets - and can drop us into some highly stressful situations. Days can be long, cell service spotty. We must often make changes to our diet, sleep, and hygiene; and there are other factors that impact our wellbeing. This is the time to define what you can control. Although sometimes choices are more limited, you can develop practices to support your physical and mental wellbeing during assignments and when you return home. Here are some suggestions to use in your practice of self-care:

**Getting Exercise.** Fire season can pose big challenges to retaining overall fitness. The ability to go on a good run, get in a yoga practice, or lift weights is all sidelined while we are sleeping in tents and pulling long shifts. For those that are on their home unit, the demands of responding to fires and staffing for severity still challenges us and our routines. Implement small practices throughout your day. If you are already working hard carrying heavy loads along firelines and digging fire breaks, then take pauses to engage some deep stretches to work out those kinks. Those that are working hard to support us from behind the desk, stand up and shake it off at regular intervals. Set your alarm for each hour, stand, and do some jumping jacks or take a short walk. Reset your mind and body. To see how easily you can incorporate exercise into your day and the benefits of that habit, watch this short video on the benefits of exercise: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQeZnyQnlSM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQeZnyQnlSM).

**Stay Connected.** Even if we are working from our home unit during a busy season, it can disrupt our ability to connect to the important people in our lives. Establish a plan to stay connected during the fire season before you get into the busiest part of your year. Make plans to enjoy friends and family when things slow down.

**Hydrate!** Sounds simple and obvious since we learn from day one in our training to stay hydrated. Energy drinks and other high-caffeine drinks with additives significantly impact our ability to stay hydrated. Energy drinks rob our bodies of water and nutrients that we need. Caffeine is a diuretic which means it makes us urinate more frequently, and thus, not retain the water we need to be healthy. These high energy drinks can also contribute to anxiety and high heart rates. This article provides information on the impact of energy drinks on hydration, health and performance: [https://www.army.mil/article/180140/the_science_behind_why_you_should_stop_chugging_so_many_energy_drinks](https://www.army.mil/article/180140/the_science_behind_why_you_should_stop_chugging_so_many_energy_drinks).

**Sleep.** Oh, how we all cherish sleep. While we may be at full speed ahead during an assignment (even on our own unit’s staffing for fire response deprivus us of sleep) we need to maximize rest and recovery on our days off. Alcohol can impact sleep quality, so if you are actively trying to recover lost hours of sleep due to a recent assignment and hoping to be recovered to go on another, limit or abstain from alcohol during these sleep recovery periods. For more information about the importance of sleep, utilize this WFSTAR module and activities: [https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/training-courses/rt-130/medical/me708](https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/training-courses/rt-130/medical/me708).

**Discussion:** As a crew, talk about how you maintain resilience during the long season. What habits do you establish for resiliency? How do you make time for this practice during fire assignments or long workdays at your unit?

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in distress, dial 988 for free, confidential support available 24/7.

To learn more about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and suicide prevention efforts visit: [https://988lifeline.org/](https://988lifeline.org/)

Suicide Prevention Week – 2022, NWCG Mental Health Subcommittee
[https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/mental-health-subcommittee](https://www.nwcg.gov/committees/mental-health-subcommittee)

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