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Monday, April 22, 2013

[DO-GOODERS: BE GOOD TO YOU](#)



WE'RE ALL WORKING HARD on a regular basis. Many of us are focusing on ways to make the world a juicier and all around better place to live in, which is a commendable quest. Go ahead and take a moment to give yourself a mental high-five. Did that feel good? (We thought so). Sometimes, us self proclaimed do-gooders spend so much time focusing on outside situations, we forget to be compassionate to ourselves along the way. And neglecting ourselves for too long can lead to a pesky little thing called burnout. “Burnout is a well-recognized psychological state in which exhaustion of physical or emotional strength or motivation occurs, usually as a result of prolonged stress,” Stacy De-Lin, MD— a Family Medicine Physician in NYC, and a vegan and animal rights activist— recently told us. “Activists can be particularly prone to burnout,” she added. Thankfully, according to Dr. De-Lin, there is an amazingly simple strategy to avoid this not-so-fun state: give yourself ample time to rest. Do-gooders of the world, you have our permission to play hookey from work for a few hours and experience the beautiful sights and scents of the Season! It’s Cherry Blossom Season at the [Brooklyn Botanical Gardens](#)! Go!

There’s actually some serious science behind smelling nice things, it turns out. “Interpretation of scent in your environment is processed by the brain’s limbic system, the part of the brain that is responsible for memory, emotion, behavior, and motivation. No other sensory system has this type of link with the neural areas of emotion and associative learning,” Dr. De-Lin explained. Whoa, mind blown. If you can’t get to a park or a Botanical Gardens fast enough, we recommend visiting your local (preferably organic) florist and treating yourself to a fragrant bouquet of Spring blooms. Some of our faves in the NYC area are [Gardenia Organics](#) and [2H Flowers](#) in Manhattan, and [GRDN BKLYN](#) in Brooklyn.



Jenny Brown, co-founder of [Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary](https://www.woodstockfarm.org/), knows a thing or two about working a lot (14 hour days, to be exact!). In addition to running the sanctuary, she is also a published [author](#), and regularly speaks around the country. Her tip for staying jovial and energetic? “I try to get to yoga classes and meditate when I’m able to. I try to take a few extra days off to visit friends when I’m traveling for speaking engagements. Also having days where I just spend time with the animals at the sanctuary reminds me why I do what I do everyday,” she told us during a recent conversation. As activists, being regularly exposed to the harsh realities of the animal exploitation industries can wear heavy on our hearts. Interacting with animals in a place where they are safe becomes essential. While the positive effects of being around animals are well-documented (reduced stress and anxiety, and reduced blood pressure are just some of the benefits), visits to sanctuaries are particularly relevant to animal advocates. “Many tell us that a visit here renews their activism and dedication to justice for farmed

animals. Sanctuaries have a unique opportunity to bring people together with the animals they are fighting for,” Jenny explained. She also added that many have described visits as helpful in combating feelings of alienation. “The comfort of community can be the best medicine,” she said. So, once again, do-gooders: you have our permission to take the day off and hurry on over to your nearest animal haven. Spring is here, and sanctuaries are officially open to visitors!

And speaking of community, “Maintaining a healthy social life and circle of friends is important,” activist John Oberg recently told us. John is an outreach coordinator for [Vegan Outreach](#), and has distributed over 340,000 pamphlets at over 200 universities in the past 3 and a half years—a testament to his tireless work ethic. As someone who has dedicated his life to advocating for animals, he emphasizes that “understanding that this is long-term work is essential.” And we cannot create lasting change without preserving ourselves in the process. “Sleeping, eating right, and exercise are important for both your ability to continue this work long-term and remaining a good example of a healthy vegan. We should try our best to be happy, healthy, and normal to create optimal influence,” John explained. Finding the balance in how much violent imagery you expose yourself to in order to educate others is another thing to be mindful of. “Watching every latest animal abuse investigation can throw you into a state of deep depression that no amount of So Delicious ice cream can dig you out of,” he cautioned. John underscored that “a sustainable pace is key.” These sentiments are also echoed by Dr. Stacy De-Lin, who recommends “setting short-term goals” when challenges may feel seem overwhelming.

Another strategy Dr. De-Lin recommends? Laughter. “Laughter is not only universal in that it is found across all human languages, but we know many animals engage in a form of laughter too, from gorillas to rats,” she said. Dr. Stacy dropping science once again: “Laughter is linked most strongly with the part of the brain that produces endorphins, the prefrontal cortex. And it decreases levels of the hormones responsible for activation of the “fight or flight” nervous system.” Ok, do-gooder, the experts have spoken: being social, eating good food, and laughing—are key. A way to combine all three? Glad you asked! If you’re a New Yorker, check out the free comedy night at Brooklyn’s Latin vegan joint [The V-Spot](#), held on the first Thursday night of every month. Hilarious comedians entertain, while you nosh on a big plate of kale tostadas—perfect. The next show is on May 2nd at 9pm. (kitchen closes at 9.30, so be sure to get there early!)



If The V-Spot is not in your vicinity, check out listings for comedy shows at other fun venues in your city (like the legendary [Upright Citizens Brigade Theater](#), that has several locations in NYC and LA). You can also score

major laughs at home, listening to vegan comedian extraordinaire [Myq Kaplan's](#) rad podcast [Hang Out With Me](#), while making yourself a nourishing meal with ingredients that do wonders for that priceless brain of yours. “Omega-3 fatty acids, found in flax seed oil, sea vegetables and algae, have been shown in multiple studies to help protect against depression,” Dr. De-Lin explained. According to Dr. De-Lin, foods like tofu and tempeh have been shown to improve cognitive function, and sufficient carb intake improves mood. Sources of healthy carbohydrates include whole grains, vegetables, fruits and beans.

Although we have a lot on our plates, we can make simple, achievable improvements in our lives. Even something as basic as deep breathing exercises during a busy day can help drive out the threat of burnout. “Avoiding burnout in a world rampant with animal suffering is absolutely vital,” John Oberg reminded us. “Animal Liberation isn’t coming overnight, so we need to keep the pressure building and ball moving forward.”

And for this, we need to keep our strength and resilience intact. Remembering to be good to ourselves unlocks our potential to do as much good as possible for animals, our friends, and our Planet. And that’s a whole world of good.

Postscript: This story became personal for me, when I had to recognize the fact that I myself was nearing burnout, realizing it was imperative that I had to take the very advice we are offering to our readers here. Last Friday, I made the decision to spend the day at Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary, leaving an office full of urgent work behind. The experience provided indispensable rest and renewal. Being kind to ourselves sometimes requires courage, and maybe even a little calculated risk. But the payoff is always worth it. — Julie Gueraseva

Writing for this story also contributed by Zoe Eisenberg. Read more of her work on her blog [Sexy Tofu](#), as well as [xoJane](#) and [I Eat Grass](#).

Brooklyn Botanical Gardens photo courtesy of Shi Xuan Huang. Sanctuary photos courtesy of Jenny Brown/WFAS. Tostadas photo courtesy of The V-Spot. Photo research assistance by Crystal Pang.

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