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[Blue Planet: An Alien's Guide to Living on Earth](#) - By Glenn Campbell

## Chapter 3

# Food and Lodging

Your body is not well-suited for extended spaceflight or activities in a vacuum, but it is a remarkably versatile vehicle for travel on Earth. The human organism is capable of a wide range of planetary interface activities, from swimming rivers to climbing mountains to walking long distances in high heels. With the touch of a finger, the body can operate a variety of specialized equipment extending its abilities -- from cars to computer keyboards -- while sounds generated in its throat allow direct communication with the natives. What's more, being an organic vehicle, the body is almost completely self-maintaining as long as certain basic needs are met.

The body's physical requirements may be chemically complex, but they are easy to recognize. The body will usually tell you whenever something is missing, and the necessary supplies can be obtained wherever humans reside. Below, we list the most important bodily requirements in order of demand, most urgent first:

1. **Oxygen** -- Oxygen is an essential reactive agent, needed for the conversion of fuel to energy. Without it, the body will expire within minutes. Fortunately, gaseous oxygen is freely available in Earth's lower atmosphere. It is taken into the body by repeated pumping of the lungs then is distributed to every cell in the body via the bloodstream. This is an automatic process requiring no conscious intervention, and you need not worry about running out of oxygen as long as you remain below an elevation of 2 kilometers, avoid breathing man-made chemical fumes and stay out of airtight spaces.

The body announces a lack of oxygen by gasping for air and flailing its limbs. When this happens, make sure the pathway to the lungs is not obstructed and seek the nearest open air. In case of fire, move as quickly as possible away from whatever is burning and try not to breathe the smoke.

In times of emotional distress, you may experience a similar gasping for air even when oxygen is adequate. This irregular breathing pattern is usually accompanied by facial contortions and water in the eyes. When this happens, do not try to control your breathing, as this only makes matters worse. Just relax, lie down if possible and let the lungs return to their natural rhythm.

2. **Minimum Temperature** -- The body generates its own heat and automatically maintains its internal temperature at

a constant 37 degrees Celsius (98.6 degrees Fahrenheit). However, the system works effectively only when the temperature immediately outside the body is already close to that. With adequate shade and evaporative coolant (water), the body can tolerate the highest temperatures found anywhere on the planet. The coldest temperatures are more problematic. At the equator, you can sleep in the open and walk around with practically nothing on (avoiding total nudity, of course), but as you move toward the poles the requirements for warm clothing and heated shelter become more burdensome. Away from the tropics, you will need to find a place to sleep that is protected from the elements, and you will want to clothe nearly all of your body most of the time.

The body indicates when the surrounding temperature is too low by shaking rapidly, pulling its arms close to its chest and withdrawing into any nearby protected area. Try putting on more clothing to conserve your body's heat. If you are out in the open, seek shelter, and if there is a thermostat on the wall, turn it up. In case of fire, try to get closer to it and add more fuel.

Other humans may label you as "cold," "warm" or "hot," but these words refer to the quality of your social interactions, not actual body temperature, which remains at 37 degrees Celcius. Such comments should not be taken as advice on how to dress -- except, perhaps, when someone calls you "hot" and you might want to cover more of your flesh to avoid unwanted advances.

3. Water -- Like oxygen, water is a vital chemical agent involved in nearly all of the body's internal activities. Apart from being the essential lubricant for all bodily processes, water is the evaporative coolant maintaining the body's temperature in warmer environments. Without it, the body can survive for hours or days, depending on the surrounding heat. Water is usually taken by mouth, either in its pure liquid form or in a variety of flavored beverages. It must be relatively free of dissolved salts, so ocean water should not be drunk even though it is plentiful. Fresh water is usually available wherever humans reside. (If it wasn't, they would not live there.) In the developed world, water can be obtained for free at drinking fountains, public restrooms and fast food restaurants (upon request). Elsewhere on Earth, sources of water are less reliable and you may have to haul it yourself from the local well.

All bodies are equipped with an automatic warning mechanism: When water is needed, the mouth becomes dry and primary urges within the brain direct the organism toward sources of liquid. If the urge to drink is not heeded, a dehydrated human will eventually fall into a stupor and die. (You should usually avoid alcoholic beverages, though, as these tend to create their own disruptive stupor.) There is no practical reason to choose flavored beverages over pure water, and because excess water is automatically eliminated from the body, there is no danger in drinking too much (apart from the embarrassment of unplanned elimination).

4. Chemical Fuel -- Commonly known as "food", the body's fuel is composed of carbohydrates, fats, proteins and other chemicals, usually mixed with water in a structured matrix or viscous gruel. Food is taken by mouth and provides both energy and the building blocks for bodily growth and repair. Most human food consists of the flesh or byproducts of lower life forms, but not all life forms are edible. A good rule to avoid poisoning is to eat only what you see other humans eat, then monitor your body's reaction to it. If the food tastes bad, spit it out, and if something you swallow causes stomach pains or diarrhea, avoid eating it again.

When the body needs fuel, it sends a signal to the brain called hunger. You feel hollow and weak, with a compulsion to consume whatever life forms are available. Unfortunately, the body sometimes sends the hunger signal even when it has ample resources of stored fuel, while the kind of food the body craves is not always the best for its long-term health. Hunger should be moderated by research and external observation. If, when standing on the bathroom scales, your view of your feet is obscured by your belly, you can safely ignore your hunger with no ill effects.

5. Sleep -- Sleep is a daily period of unconsciousness that will occupy about one-third of your time on Earth. It is a repair period for the nervous system, and it also provides a convenient activity for the relatively boring period after the sun goes down. (Nightlife on Earth is said to be exciting but is much overrated.) You may not understand the need for sleep; nonetheless, it will overtake you eventually, so you ought to arrange your sleeping accommodations before it happens. Since the body's metabolism slows during sleep, and unconsciousness

imposes some physical risks, you will need to find a place that is both warm and protected from physical threat. To prevent pooling of blood in the extremities, it is necessary to place the body in a horizontal position, hence the invention of the human bed with its own rich set of cultural customs.

When the body needs sleep, its activities slow considerably. The eyes become dry, and you will find it difficult to hold them open. You may yawn repeatedly -- an unusual style of breathing -- and your thoughts become dominated by an urge to lie down. If you are deprived of sleep for an extended period, your cognitive functioning will start to deteriorate, and involuntary unconsciousness could take you over at an inopportune moment. For this reason, it is inadvisable to drive a car or operate other dangerous machinery when deprived of sleep. Another potential problem is sleep not coming when you want it to; in that case, you should get up and engage in productive activities (not just lie in bed) until you are tired enough to sleep soundly. Like the irregular breathing and watery eyes described above, an inability to sleep is often connected to emotional distress. You may be able to sleep better if you can locate the injury or conflict that is causing the distress and resolve it.

Do not be alarmed if you experience hallucinations while sleeping. The scenes you see at night may be frightening or bizarre and could prompt you to take drastic actions like jumping off buildings or running from the police. Fortunately, the physical body is paralyzed during these episodes and is unlikely to follow your orders -- so just relax and let it happen. The hallucinations of sleep are not entirely random. If you can remember them later, they can sometimes help you understand your body's more complicated needs.

The human brain has many complex and costly psychological needs that we will discuss later, but fulfilling the physical requirements above will at least keep you alive. On Earth, you do not have to think much about oxygen, while fresh water becomes an issue only when traveling at sea or in the desert. Obtaining fuel, maintaining temperature and finding a place to sleep are usually more difficult. A host family should provide these services to you during your first years on Earth, but what happens after that? Food, clothing and shelter are available on Earth in a wide variety, but most variations cost money, and money generally requires employment, a topic we have not yet covered. Without money, your options are limited, but you still have some. Accommodations on Earth range from budget to luxury, but until you obtain some cash, we can discuss only the sub-budget options, mainly requiring creativity.

## **Living off the Land**

Given sufficient knowledge of what is edible, you can survive in the woods or jungle with help from no one, but life alone with nature is difficult and dangerous, and survival is a full-time occupation. While some humans may romanticize the "natural" lifestyle of living in a hut and eating bugs and berries, it gets old quickly. You want to learn about life and explore the planet, not just survive, and modern technology can give you more time for those pursuits. There are many man-made tools, like knives and plastic containers, that can greatly improve your existence. Why spend hours hitting two rocks together when you can strike a match instead?

You can do much better if you are willing to rummage through the refuse of humanity, using whatever discarded materials you come across. If you happen to have been born in a developed country, you're on Easy Street. Comfortable shelters can be constructed from corrugated cardboard and old mattresses, while used clothing -- although not always stylish -- can often be found abandoned along the road. Only about half of the food prepared in the developed world is actually consumed, so if you can find where the other half is discarded and get to it before it rots, you can eat very well indeed.

On the other hand, if you happen to be born in an underdeveloped country, a larger portion of the population is living at your level, so competition for resources is fierce and life is much harder. You will have to identify your body's most important needs and concentrate all of your energies on filling them. You will have to be creative and opportunistic. When your survival is on the line, many plants and most animals are edible, but you must be willing to try unpleasant alternatives. If pushed to the edge, you can even eat your fellow man, but it ever comes to that, your fellow man is probably as thin and weak as you are and probably won't sustain you for very long. For this and other reasons, cannibalism is usually a bad policy and is strongly discouraged.

In the developed world, living off the wastes of others is socially disapproved -- so competition is limited and the

pickings are very good. Once, every town in the developed world had its dump: one central location where all the resources you needed could be found in exposed piles. Today, environmental regulations have closed the dump and replaced it with controlled landfills where resources are quickly plowed under. Penniless visitors must now be content with the dumpster, a large steel box found in the back of most businesses. Since a dumpster is emptied regularly, there is not much time to comb through it. The advantage, though, is that any food you do find you know will be fresh, not more than a few days old.

**====> No matter how cold it gets, you should resist the temptation to sleep in a dumpster. If you do, you may find yourself crushed, compacted and on your way to the landfill.**

In the developed world, others may label you "homeless," a word with unfairly negative connotations. When economic opportunities are available, homelessness is seen as a synonym for mental illness. Indeed, the vast majority of people living the dumpster lifestyle are either schizophrenic or addicted to drugs or alcohol. Any advances they make are wiped out by their own self-destructive behavior, so they may be living at this level for the remainder of their short lives. You are different. Presumably free of major mental illness, you can build upon whatever skills and resources you possess to make a better life for yourself.

If you are going to build a cardboard shack, make it a carefully constructed one that will be comfortable and last a while. You have plenty of free time at this point, so why not use it to improve your circumstances? Choose your location carefully. Don't live in the middle of the city as most of the homeless feel compelled to do; find a place on the edge of the woods where you won't be disturbed. If you are going to be homeless, do it someplace warm, like the southern third of the United States. Whatever you do, stay out of New York City, where you have to be crazy to live even if you have a home.

## Lodging Requirements

While most other Earth animals survive easily in the open environment, humans have no fur or feathers so must actively protect themselves from the elements. Your first line of defense is clothing, which conserves heat in cold environments and protects the skin from too much sun in warmer ones. Except in the coldest climates near the poles, clothing alone can keep you warm enough to stay alive during the day; you simply add layers until you are comfortable. At night, however, unconsciousness increases the body's need for heat and physical protection, and clothing may not be enough.

At night, most humans retreat into some kind of burrow or box. This protects them from wind, precipitation and most outside dangers. It also allows the air around them to be artificially heated, usually by controlled fire. Among modern humans, the box is generally more popular than the burrow, because it is more easily constructed. Large boxes are hotel rooms, apartments, houses, mansions or palaces, which may each be subdivided into several rooms. Smaller accommodations are tents, huts, caves or cardboard shacks, which may be no less comfortable than the big boxes when you are asleep. The chief advantage of a larger box is that it gives you more space to store your stuff.

What is "stuff"? By this we mean possessions, or the physical resources that you are preserving for future use. Let's say you have been rummaging through a dumpster and come across a choice piece of lumber or recently uneaten hamburger that you can't use right now but might need in the future. If you have your own storage box, you can store these resources there until you are ready use them. The bigger the accommodations you have, the more resources you can retain when they become available, and more time and energy you will save in the long run. For example, your box might allow you to store several days' worth of uneaten hamburgers, meaning fewer trips to the dumpster behind McDonalds.

It is not essential that your preserved resources be stored in the same place you sleep, but it is much easier that way. Then you don't have to commute to your storage area and can eat whenever you want. Another reason for sleeping with your stuff is that it discourages people from stealing it. We are sad to report that theft is a really big problem on Earth, especially in communities with limited resources. People will gladly steal your stuff if it can save them the effort of obtaining it themselves, but they mainly do it when they think you are not looking. If you sleep with your stuff, any unusual noise will snap you out of your unconsciousness, giving you a chance to confront the intruder. Just the possibility of such a confrontation will turn away most thieves.

From your earliest days on Earth, you will inevitably start accumulating resources, including clothing, toys, food, tools, kitchen utensils, hardware, electronic devices, furniture, pets, medicines, vehicles, books, papers and thousands of miscellaneous objects that are retained solely for emotional reasons. That's your stuff. Stuff can be both a burden and a vital asset. If you have too much stuff, it holds you down, forcing you to spend too much of your resources maintaining and protecting it, but you can't live without stuff either. Your possessions includes clothing and other tools that may be essential to your survival and that you might have to defend with the same vigilance as your body itself.

The dumpster lifestyle may work for a while, but it doesn't give you much reliable storage. As you start accumulating stuff, protecting it will be an increasingly difficult problem. In addition, you may become dissatisfied with the quality of the materials you find in dumpsters. Once you see all that Earth has to offer, you may demand access to better resources. No matter how interesting and exotic Earth may seem at first, you will soon take it for granted. Your focus will shift from just hanging out on the street to finding ways to improve your long-term comfort.

## The Power of Self Improvement

Before you can leave the bottommost rung of human existence you must decide that you want to. This is a more difficult dilemma than it seems. Until now, you have been a victim of circumstance. You did not choose to visit Earth, and you cannot be held responsible for your starting circumstances. Once you start making decisions, you do become responsible. If you step away from the straight-line path ahead of you and something goes wrong as a result, you alone must accept the blame.

**====> On Earth, if you make a decision, you must bear responsibility for its results.**

There is a law in some quarters of the universe that an alien should not interfere in local cultures. Your good-intentioned attempts to improve human civilization may result instead in its destruction. Look at the irreparable damage that modern technology and Christian missionaries have caused to the indigenous peoples of Earth. Life-saving medicine and efficient agriculture, introduced into cultures without effective birth control, has been more destructive than all the weapons of all the wars in human history. On Earth, you can kill with kindness and maim with knowledge. To avoid messing with human history, the theory goes, an alien should interact as little as possible with the local population.

While there is some merit in the non-interference philosophy, you enjoy an exemption. You came here without any memory of a previous life, which means you are probably not carrying any alien technology or forbidden knowledge that might corrupt humanity. You arrived on this planet as an ordinary human, and you were integrated into the local culture before you had any choice in the matter. By virtue of existing here in a human body, you are involved, and there is no way to escape your social role. By no decision of yours, you were born into a host family and became part of their lives. Now, everything you do -- or choose not to do -- is a decision whose results you are responsible for. Even suicide could have as profound an effect on your surroundings as any active intervention.

For you, non-interference is now impossible. Like it or not, you have already become part of human history. The best you can hope for is responsible interference. When you think about it, involvement with humanity is an enormous burden. If you give a begger a dollar and he uses it to buy a gun that he eventually kills someone with, are you responsible for that death? Maybe. It depends on what you could have realistically foreseen and whether you obeyed a responsible policy. You may also be liable -- morally if not legally -- if you fail to give a begger a dollar and he starves to death as a result. Once you accept responsibility for your actions, life on Earth is a minefield. Even if you don't pull the trigger yourself, you will kill people, or at least set the stage for them being killed. Humans around the world are suffering now because you failed to help them. If a cruel dictator rules some distant country, he does so, in part, because you have chosen not to intervene.

However, accepting responsibility also has its rewards. You no longer have to live out of dumpsters. You can now interact with other humans, trade with them and negotiate better circumstances for yourself. Part of your responsibility is to assure that your own body and mind are properly maintained and housed, because without them you have no tools to work with. Maintaining your tools provides you with a goal, even if you don't know now what you will use those tools for.

There are plenty of excuses for not improving yourself and not accepting responsibility. Some visitors have "issues" with their confinement on Earth. They say, "I was brought here without my consent, so I am not going to cooperate." As children, they throw tantrums and threaten to hold their breath until they die. As adults, they refuse to cooperate with others or with the flawed political realities of their society. Like other political prisoners, they see any form of assimilation as an unacceptable compromise of their free will. They are martyrs who take refuge in not making active decisions and not playing the game, therefore feeling free of responsibility for what happens.

Some visitors expect to be rescued. They believe that gods, spirits or other extraterrestrial beings will hear their distress signals and eventually take them away to the place they belong. Their main goal on Earth is to hold on until the rescue ship comes. To them, life on Earth is inherently defective -- a punishment for the sins of Adam, perhaps -- and their primary interest is in some other planet. Since their focus is on pleasing the gods and preparing for the next step, their comfort or effectiveness in the current incarnation is not seen as important.

Other visitors believe in fatalism. They feel that any positive action they take is useless because it will always be overridden by more powerful forces. They can point to countless instances where their attempts to improve themselves have been brutally crushed by the Earth establishment, leading to even greater pain than before. Now, they have given up trying and prefer to follow the path of least resistance.

You can't win any arguments with these people. Their logic is seemingly flawless but always rests on some deeply held emotional assumption. The fatalist holds a self-fulfilling belief in his own inevitable failure, and he fails, of course, because he does not honestly try. The person who waits for an afterlife believes that such a place exists and is more important than Earth; to him, this planet is unworthy of investment, so his life here naturally becomes defective. The martyr, meanwhile, believes in some form of universal justice, where his actions are judged by some cosmic criteria other than their effect; as he starves himself in prison to protest his captivity, he fails to understand that nobody has noticed and that nothing is achieved by his non-cooperation except his own misery.

To improve your circumstances on Earth, you, too, must accept some emotional assumptions -- that life is real, that it matters, and that you have some control over your future. You can't "prove" that you have the power to change things here, but this philosophy sure makes life easier. It allows you to take positive actions that, over time, will decrease your pain and improve your satisfaction with the Earth experience. To improve yourself, you have to set aside your anger and your hopes for an early rescue. You must accept this planet as your own and be willing to make investments here. Maybe the ship will come tomorrow, but in the meantime you must find a comfortable place for yourself and plan on being here for the full duration of the tour.

Next: [Employment and its Consequences](#)

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