

# Pacing your Daily Activities

Pain Management Program at  
St. Joseph's Health Care London

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CARING FOR THE BODY,  
MIND & SPIRIT SINCE 1869



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# Pacing Daily Activities

Pacing is a way to manage your activities and energy so you can do what matters most without making your pain or fatigue worse.

## **Key Points:**

- Pacing is a self-management strategy that helps you change your approach to activities.
- Pacing means finding a balance between time spent on activity and rest. This balance lets you participate in activities while also managing your pain and fatigue.
- Many people with chronic pain have trouble with finding this balance and often under-do or over-do activities.

## Under-Doing

- Some people have a very low activity level and rest most of the time.
- Under-doing activities often starts early, when people think that a lot of rest will help.
- Rest is helpful when you are sick or hurt, so it makes sense.
- Too much rest can increase pain and stiffness, lower strength and mobility and affect your mood.
- We want you to gradually add activities back into your life.

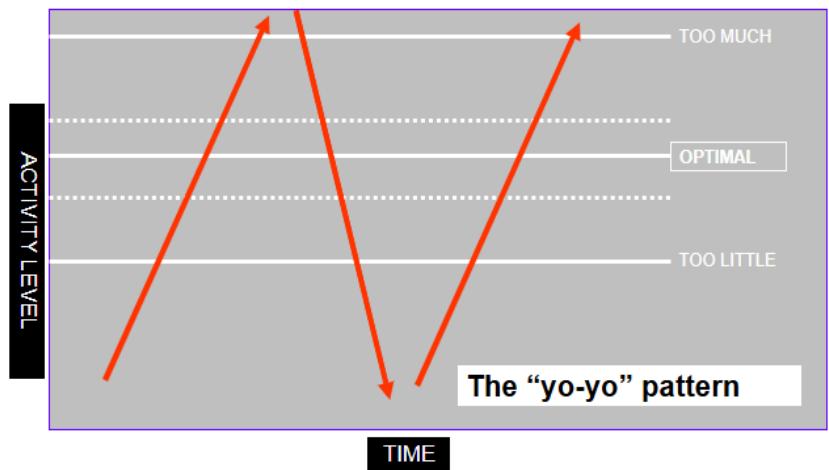
## Over- Doing

- Some people push through their pain and do too much. They push through on days when their symptoms are lower.
- They may achieve their goals, but this can lead to flare-ups and longer rest periods to recover. Over time, this can increase pain and tiredness and lower function.



# Yo-Yo Pattern

The yo-yo pattern is a cycle that can disrupt your daily life. During “down” periods, you may not be able to do important activities, like going for your daily walk or having coffee with a friend.



# Benefits to Pacing

Pacing your activities can help you feel better, do more, and get the most out of your day.

## Key Points:

- Pacing can help you increase the number of “active hours” you have each day and week.
- Research shows that people who pace their activities often have less pain and tiredness.
- Pacing can help you handle activities for longer without making your symptoms worse.
- It can break the cycle of activity and pain, so you can take part in activities that are important to you and your quality of life.
- Pacing can also make other treatments, like injections or infusions, more effective.

# Tolerance Levels

Your tolerance level is how long or how much you can do an activity before your pain, tiredness, or other symptoms start to increase.

## Key Points:

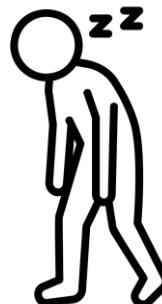
- You can slowly increase your tolerance every few weeks if you feel good at your current activity level.
- You will not get stronger or handle more activity by always pushing past your limits.
- Using a timer can help you stick to your tolerance levels.
- Try setting a timer for 15–20 minutes when doing housework, walking, working in the yard, or using the computer. Take a short break when the timer goes off.
- You will get more done if you pace your activities and take regular breaks, even on days when your symptoms are lower.

# Pain and Fatigue Warning Signs

Paying attention to your body's warning signs can help you avoid overdoing activities and making your symptoms worse.

## Key Points:

- Notice the signs of pain and tiredness before it's too late. These signs tell you when you have reached your activity limit.
- Ask yourself: Am I ignoring my pain or other warning signs just to finish the task?
- Even if you finish the task, pushing past your limits can make your symptoms much worse and take longer to recover - sometimes for the rest of the day or even a few days.



# Rest and Relaxation

Taking regular rest breaks is an important part of managing your energy, pain, and fatigue.

- The best way to save or increase your energy is by planning enough rest time during your day. Rest time should match your needs and be something you enjoy.
- Make sure your rest time actually helps reduce your symptoms.
- Think of ways to fit in rest during less flexible times, like at work, at home with kids, or in social situations.
- Taking a rest break is not a sign of weakness or failure; it is a smart way to restore your energy and manage your pain.
- The rule of finishing all your work before taking a break does not work well when you have chronic pain.
- As your symptoms improve, you may be able to reduce how often or how long your rest breaks are.
- As your symptoms improve you may be able to reduce the number and/or duration of your rest breaks.



# Benefits of Rest

Taking rest breaks has many positive effects for your body and mind.

- Helps manage pain better
- Lets your body restore energy
- Helps relax muscles and repair soft tissues
- Improves your ability to do activities
- Increases your productivity during the day and week
- Improves your focus and concentration

## Incorporate rest into your routine

- You will need to find your own personal balance between rest and activity - everyone is different.
- Depending on the activity, you may need shorter or longer rest breaks (for example, 5 minutes when washing dishes, 15-20 minutes when gardening).

# Planning your Activities

Planning your day can help you use your energy wisely and get the most important things done.

- We often make to-do lists, but sometimes we don't have enough time or energy to complete everything.
- Activities need to be prioritized, keeping the big picture in mind.

# Priorities

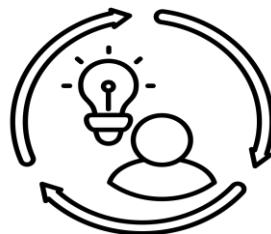
- Make sure rest is one of your top priorities.
- Balance your daily priorities with rest so you can manage your symptoms and feel your best.
- You must determine if your priorities are achievable with the amount of energy you have for a given day.
- If you have too many priorities, low energy, or difficulty managing your symptoms, it may be time to adjust your expectations or simplify tasks.

# Adjust Standards for Activities

It is important to match your activity standards to your energy levels to avoid unnecessary pain or fatigue.

## Key Points:

- Standards for activities, especially high standards, need to be reassessed.
- Think about what activities you could eliminate or delegate.
- Some activities may be difficult, increase your pain, or use a lot of energy, such as weeding, cleaning, or grocery shopping.
- People who do not adjust their standards and take an all-or-nothing approach often trigger flare-ups. Over time, this can lead to avoiding activities that were once important.



# Simplifying Tasks

- The way you are going about your daily tasks may be wasting energy and placing strain on painful areas.
- Saving a little bit of energy throughout the day adds up and is more important now, that you have a limited amount of energy.

## Breaking up tasks

- Tasks need to be rethought and split into smaller chunks.
- How much you need to break up a task depends on your tolerance level for any given activity
- Example: unload the bottom of the dishwasher, have breakfast then unload the top.
- Some tasks may take an entire day, week or even longer to accomplish.
- Meal prep could be spread out across the day. Laundry and groceries spread out across the week
- Spread exercises across the day instead of doing 30 minutes all at once, do three 10 minutes sessions.
- Cleaning windows, drawers, closet, gardens spread out across the month
- This allows specific muscles used during a task to rest.

# Alternating activities

- In addition to breaking up activities and resting, you can alternate between different tasks. It's important to listen to your body, as it will tell you when to switch activities.
- Alternating tasks will also help you to achieve your daily activities without overdoing it.
- Switch between demanding activities, like vacuuming, and easier ones, like checking mail or making phone calls.
- Alternate between sitting and standing activities, such as standing to wash dishes and sitting to fold the laundry.
- Alternate between a physical and a mental task such as sweeping and paying bills.
- By alternating tasks, you use different muscle groups, which helps prevent fatigue. It might feel odd at first, and you may feel like you're not getting much done—that's normal
- Avoid switching between too many activities at once. Alternating wisely helps you accomplish more without overdoing it.
- Don't forget that even though alternating tasks is helpful, your body also needs regular rest time during the day!

## Sit to Perform Activities

Think of activities you could do seated or alternate between sitting and standing.

- Dressing
- Showering
- Meal prep
- Washing dishes
- Gardening



Doing activities while seated can use about 20 per cent less energy.

## Organize your Space

- Keeping items within easy reach helps you use better posture, save energy, and manage your symptoms.

## Assistive Devices

- Using devices can increase your independence and tolerance level and manage your symptoms.

## Lightweight Equipment

- Replace heavy items with lighter ones. Using lightweight equipment can help you do more activities without increasing your pain or fatigue.

## Watch your Breathing

- Holding your breath while doing activities can make your muscles tense, which increases pain and fatigue..
- You can increase your activity tolerance by just focusing on your breathing!



## Slow Down your Pace

- Moving too quickly can make your muscles tense, which uses more energy.
- Slowing down helps relax your muscles, manage pain and fatigue, and increase your activity tolerance.
- Going slower also reduces the chance of injury or mistakes while doing tasks.

## Pacing Activities

By modifying and planning your activities you can start to participate in activities that are important to you, while managing your pain and fatigue.

Participating in meaningful daily activities is essential for your health and quality of life.