

Focus on Pacing

Why do we need to look at Pacing?

Pacing is the strategy we use to determine what level of activity we can manage within the amount of resources, such as energy, we have available. It is about breaking up a task into component parts so that we can do bits at a time. Pacing can initially create frustration and resentment, but is crucial in avoiding 'boom' and 'bust':

- Monday - good day, sun is shining- going to get washing cleared and clean the kitchen
- Tuesday – struggling, exhausted, some of the day in bed, really fed up
- Wednesday – still feeling worn out but need to get on as I really need to get some food, don't want to chat with friends as not great company – shop and unpack as quick as I can
- Thursday – day is written off - rest all day
- Friday – feel better so try and get back on track

Sometimes pushing on to complete a task doesn't get things done quicker. Sometimes an activity is so important that it is worth the energy use and after effects, such as a party, making a meal for the family or going to the football match. The importance of the tasks ('Prioritising' covers this) will guide how we pace ourselves and the affects our mental wellbeing.

Why is it important?

By using pacing, we plan our time across an hour, a day, a week or even longer. It involves thinking about a task and whether it can break up into parts. What can I manage? Over how long can I spread the task? If you were to 'clean the house' you can think of it in small bits such as different rooms, eg 'bathroom' or 'bedroom', or different tasks eg 'dusting' or 'hoovering'. By thinking about tasks in this way you can set yourself aims or goals to stick to. This means that you stop, or change activity to a different type, before you have to stop due to your fatigue, pain or breathlessness. Pacing gives a better sense of control so positively impacting on how we manage symptoms as well as being better for our mental wellbeing.

The next section covers how to increase your activity levels - talk to you healthcare professional about whether this is the right approach for you. If this isn't, you can skip ahead to the hits and tips section.

Activity can be seen as blocks so you can add more of these 'blocks' in small amounts. These blocks may be certain amounts of time, such as: session one = 10 minutes, session two = 10 minutes plus 1 minute and session three = 10 minutes plus 1 minute plus another 1 minute.

The important starting point is identifying what you can comfortably manage, known as a baseline. From there you can consider how you go about building up your activity levels if that is your aim.

Example of building activity levels:

Standing to wash up. Start with an amount of time you feel is achievable (your baseline). Think about how much you can manage on a good day and how much on a bad day and identify a baseline somewhere in between.

Think about how you can build on this, adding extra time before you rest/ change activity/ change position. Increasing 10% at a time allows you to carefully increase length of time doing an activity. Keep at the same activity level until you feel ready to increase it in these small amounts. If you are feeling good, don't be tempted to do longer than planned- stick with it to avoid the potential of the boom and bust. You can use this pacing and planning to help to set personal goals (see the 'goal setting' information).

Hints, tips and useful information

- Don't cram your day – spread your tasks throughout the day.
- Allow yourself regular rest breaks and stop before you become overtired.
- Adjust your list of things to do if you need to – prioritise
- Can you do half today and half tomorrow?
- Alternate active tasks such as shopping and cleaning with quiet tasks such as reading post or emails.
- Avoid rushing.
- Will doing it in 'bits' affect your enjoyment – there are times we will want to blow the energy budget because it was worth it- it's all about planning

Get practical

- Think of an activity you would normally see as one job and break it into smaller tasks.
- How did I do? Use the ideal vs actual day to look at what happened through the day.
- Look at the 'focus on Planning' information sheet to put pacing into a daily or weekly plan.
- Think about tasks important to you – which of these could be broken up into small parts and not affect your enjoyment or sense of achievement?
- If you are building up activity levels: Pacing Plan - Try setting your own. The example is a walk - be mindful of any unforeseen impacts eg seeing a neighbour who may want to chat – think about how you will manage this if it arises so that you aren't doing more than you planned.