

Pacing and Activity Management

Information for patients, relatives and carers

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What is pacing and activity management?

Pacing and activity management is a set of skills used to help manage persistent pain. It involves working towards getting a balance and variation of day to day activities on good days as well as bad days. It requires not overdoing activities on a good day and not stopping activities or resting a lot on bad days.

Pacing requires focus and self-determination, and it can take time and practice to make changes to your daily routines and habits.

Pacing and activity management looks at what is involved in carrying out everyday tasks, and what type of demands those tasks place upon you. Most activities have different demands; they can be physical, emotional or cognitive demands, often tasks involve all three.

What are the benefits of pacing and activity management?

- Pacing is a good way to give you control over what you do and manage your pain more effectively.
- Pacing aims to smooth out the highs and lows of the “boom and bust” cycle; also known as the Over activity / Underactivity cycle.
- Pacing can help you to keep to a similar amount of activity each day whether it is a good or bad day.

- Effective pacing allows you to gradually increase your activities over time so you can achieve more without flaring up your pain.
- You may start to feel that you have more energy when you are pacing regularly.
- Your sleep pattern may improve.
- You may find you are able to do activities you enjoy rather than just doing the activities you need to do.

The four p's of pacing and activity management – prioritising, planning, pacing and problem solving:

Prioritising: this is the first step in pacing and activity management, and it requires thinking about your day to day commitments. Consider the following:

- What are the most important things that need to be done first?
- What commitments have I already made?
- Does the task need to be done today or could it wait until another day?
- Does the task need to be done at all?
- Do you need to ask for support from friends and family?



Planning: once you have prioritised what has to be done, the next stage is to plan your tasks over both the day and the week making sure the activities that you find difficult are spread out. Think about some of the following when planning:

- What does the task or activity involve?
- Can you break the activity down into different stages?
- Can you include frequent changes of position?
- What do you need to carry out the activity?
- Are your activities realistic?
- What situations may get in the way of what you want to do?
- What will help you plan your week's activity; see activity scheduling sheet or can you use a calendar or phone?
- Have you included pleasurable activities?



Pacing: once you have been able to prioritise and plan your activities, you will need to use pacing skills to carry them out. Most tasks have differing demands and intensity which can involve aspects that are physical, cognitive or emotional. So it can help to think about the following:

- Consider the physical demands of the task, for example. sitting, standing, walking, lifting, carrying items etc.
- Consider the cognitive demands of the task, for example do you have to remember things, organise yourself, concentrate, calculate, write, read etc.?
- Consider whether the task involves or provokes any **emotional** responses, for example, frustration at your limitations, worry or anxiety about yourself or others, anger, confidence and self-esteem issues.
- Use the activity scheduling sheet to help you plan, monitor your daily activities and balance the demands of each task evenly.
- Work out your baselines for sitting, standing, and walking: See Setting baselines and activity management sheet.



- Time yourself; use time as a guide to change position, posture or the activity before your pain starts to increase; use something to help remind you to change position:



Problem solving: changing habits can be challenging. It is important to take some time to review the situation.

- Was your baseline realistic?
- Did something unexpected interfere?
- Are you ready to step up your activity levels?
- Have you got an even distribution of different types of tasks?
- Do people around you understand what you are trying to achieve?



Example of how pacing and activity management can help

Gill has struggled with back pain for five years. Gill lives with her partner and two children, and works part time in a shop. Gill was stuck in a spiral of over activity during the week and increased pain and exhaustion by the weekend. Gill struggled to juggle work, home and family demands.



Using the activity scheduling sheets, Gill planned her weekly routine spreading out tasks evenly throughout the whole of the week.

Gill worked out her baselines for sitting, standing, and walking and started to incorporate them first into one task of cooking a meal. She changed position regularly throughout the activity, avoiding aggravation of her pain.

Over time Gill used the baselines in other household activities, using a timer on her phone as a prompt to change position. When she was able to do this regularly, she started to increase her baselines and then introduced them at work. Over six months Gill found she had better control over her pain. She was able to continue to work despite her pain and not feel so exhausted at weekends, so was able to enjoy spending more time with her family.



Remember the 4Ps!

Prioritise

Plan

Pace

Problem solve

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact: Shona Thompson ACS Occupational Therapist.
Email: Shona.Thompson3@nhs.net, Telephone: 01904 725395

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