

INFORMATION SHEET

PACING FOR PAIN MANAGEMENT

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Pain usually leads to changes in activity levels and when dealing with pain we all have good days and bad days. On a good day, when your pain is not too bad, you may increase your activity level, or you may find that you push harder, determined the pain won't beat you or you may give up activities as a way to avoid pain.

Increasing activity levels on a good day or pushing harder can mean you experience a flare-up of symptoms and you may then need to reduce your activity for the next day or so. This is called the 'Boom-Bust Cycle' or 'Over and Under Activity Cycle'. Over time, this can lead to you avoiding activity and you may notice that you are becoming less and less active.

The cycle can be changed by a plan of action called pacing which is when you regulate activity. The aim of pacing is to help you to achieve your goals, rather than avoiding activity.

Pacing has two parts to it:

1. Conserving energy for activities / tasks you value or need to do (for example, social activities or cooking a meal)
2. Setting graduated activity / task quotas to help you to increase your ability and tolerance to do activities / tasks

It is a 'time-contingent' approach to activities / tasks rather than a 'pain-contingent' approach. This means that an activity / task is based on a measurement such as an amount of time, a distance, number of repetitions rather than pain. This measure gives you a target and a limit for the activity / task. For example, 15 minutes of walking or 20 minutes of light housework. It gives you a basis from which to build 'activity tolerance' which is important to allow you to do everyday activities / tasks.

Pacing is important in pain management because it helps you to stay active, doing the things you care about and want or need to do, and helps you to avoid pain flares. Pacing helps you to:

- do more of what is important to you
- experience less pain flares
- reduce pain in the future
- feel more in control of your life

PACING PLAN

STEP 1 – PLAN YOUR ACTIVITIES / TASKS

Think about what you have to get done, for example getting ready for the day, cooking a meal, cleaning, going to work.

Also think about the things you care about and give attention to those things that deserve it, the truly important things for you. Do activities / tasks every day that reflect these values alongside the activities / tasks that have to be done. So for example, if your relationship with your partner is highly valued to you, you may plan to spend time talking with them over dinner, or arranging an activity together; if caring for your children is something you value highly you might include activities with them such as listening to them read or cook them a nutritious meal; if your health is a high priority to you, include some gentle exercise each day, eat some healthy food, make that appointment you have been meaning to do.

STEP 2 – PRIORITISE

Once your activities / tasks are written down in front of you, arrange them into order of priority. Ask yourself if each activity / tasks really needs to get done, and then cross off those that are not necessary. If there is one really important thing you need to do, arrange your day around this task.

STEP 3 – SET YOUR GOAL

Your goal may be to conserve energy to spend time with someone or it may be to increase your ability and tolerance to do something, for example walking (see next page on goal setting)

STEP 4 – MEASURE ACTIVITIES / TASKS

Time how long you can do your activity / tasks before there is a flare in symptoms, write the time down. Do the same activity / task each day for 3 days and at the end of the 3 days calculate the average time taken for each activity

$DAY 1 + DAY 2 + DAY 3 \div 3 = AVERAGE$

STEP 5 – SET THE BASELINE

After the average time has been calculated, take off 20%. The remaining 80% is your baseline and this is the amount of activity you should do / the amount of time you should spend on the task.

$AVERAGE - 20\% = BASELINE$

STEP 6 – PLAN ACTIVITIES AND REST PERIODS

Write down a weekly plan to help you balance out tasks and to focus on your goals. Make a schedule for each day using the baseline time for the activities / tasks you want to or need to complete.

Plan and take regular rest periods, even on good days, and particularly before and after stressful or demanding (physical or mental) tasks. Rest periods are a good time to practice relaxation technique, listen to some music, read a book, journal, message a friend, or meditate.

Once the baseline time has been reached stop doing the activity / task even if you are in the middle of it and even if you are feeling good. Remember, pacing is about reducing the risk of overdoing things and causing a symptom flare up or progressing too quickly and flaring up.

STEP 7 - INCREASE BASELINE (FOR INCREASING ABILITY AND TOLERANCE OF ACTIVITIES)

After one week slowly increase the time for an activity / task by 10% and keep increasing each week until you meet your goal.

Make sure you feel comfortable before you increase your activity.

- For week 1: WEEK 1 BASELINE + 10% = WEEK 2 BASELINE
- For week 2: WEEK 2 BASELINE + 10% = WEEK 3 BASELINE
- For week 3: WEEK 3 BASELINE + 10% = WEEK 4 BASELINE etc.

PACING PLAN EXAMPLE

GOAL

In seven weeks' time I want to walk for 40 minutes one day a week

MEASURE ACTIVITY AND SET THE BASELINE

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Average	Baseline Time
Walking	30 minutes	25 minutes	35 minutes	30 minutes	24 minutes

INCREASE BASELINE FOR INCREASED ABILITY AND TOLERANCE OF ACTIVITY

	Week 1 Baseline Time	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
Walking	24 minutes	26 minutes	29 minutes	31 minutes	35 minutes	38 minutes	41 minutes

For further information:

- Insight Endometriosis: Pacing for Pain Management Factsheet
- Insight Endometriosis: Pacing Plan Template

References:

- painHEALTH
<https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/pacing-and-goal-setting/>