

# Pacing Factsheet

## What is Pacing?

Pacing is a skill that enables you to consistently carry out activities without causing extra pain or fatigue. It is a middle ground between doing nothing and over-exertion. Pacing also means spending just enough time on an activity to get the most out of it, without pushing yourself so far that you end up in a lot more pain or fatigue. Over time you may find that pacing enables you to do more.

## Things to Consider When Pacing

Pacing is about judging when to stop an activity based on TIME and not on PAIN

- Pacing will give you more control
- The baseline should be used on 'good' days and 'bad' days. To begin with you may find it difficult to limit yourself on good days.
- Using a baseline leads to improved tolerances and achievement.
- You may find a time useful to start with to remind yourself to change position.
- Taking a break is not a sign of weakness or failure: it is a wise move to allow you to gradually build up your stamina.

## How Do You Get Started Pacing?

Decide what your goals are first: what do you value most?

Be patient with yourself – it might take some time, but it will be worth it.

## Setting Goals

**Plan and Prioritise:** Give attention to those things that deserve it, the truly important things for you. Do activities every day that reflect these values.

**Write Down the Things You Have to do:** arrange them in order of priority; If there is one really important thing you need to do, arrange your day around this task.

**Do Little and Often:** many activities that you might have given up (like gardening), become possible again. This means a change of emphasis and not expecting yourself to do things like you used to. For example, breaking down tasks such as cleaning or gardening into smaller amounts.

**Alternate Tasks:** Plan to alternate heavier tasks with lighter or less stressful ones. Plan to incorporate relaxation periods every day. Writing down a weekly plan can help you to balance out tasks and to focus on your goals.

## What Are The Steps To Pacing?

### Step 1. Set The Baseline

The key is to work out how long you can do a task without a pain or fatigue flare. Here it is important to remember that it is normal to expect some pain increase after an activity.

- write the time, distance or number of times that you can do the activity or task without a pain flare
- set your baseline based on the most limiting symptom for that activity (e.g. pain, fatigue)
- taking 3 measures over 3 days often gives the best guide
- take an average of these measures: add the 3 numbers together, then divide by 3. You should then reduce this number by 20% (or multiple by 0.8) to give yourself a buffer. This is your first week baseline for activity “one”. Repeat for other activities.
- you can calculate this number on your phone, calculator or computer

### Step 2. Repeat The Task Daily

Using your baseline number, do this activity daily for the first week using this baseline time (e.g. standing, doing dishes), distance (e.g. walk), or number (e.g. number of shirts ironed, number of book pages read, number of repetitions of a particular exercise).

### Step 3. Increase By 10% Per Week

Slowly increase the time, distance, or number of repetitions each week by 10% (or multiply the baseline number by 1.1). This becomes your baseline for the second week.

### Step 4. Build Up Your Activity Levels Using SMART Goals.

SMART goals stand for: Sustainable, Meaningful, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed. Write your goals down to help you to stay on track and remind you of those things that are important to you.

### Step 5. Small Bits Often

Take regular planned rests and relaxation breaks, even on days when you feel pretty good, are essential. Make sure you plan short rests before and after particularly stressful or demanding tasks. Practising relaxation, stretching and daily walks, even on not so good days also helps control the pain and fatigue.

## Pacing tips.

- Set short, timed windows of activity
- Change position and activity regularly
- Break tasks into smaller jobs through-out the day
- Break large tasks into smaller jobs over a week
- Take short, frequent breaks
- Stick with your plan, not your limits (just cause your pain permits, don't overdo things on a good day)
- Learn about your pain and current limitations
- Self-management and self-discipline

## Where Can I Get Help?

There are health professionals that can help you to learn pacing. Some are listed below.

- Physiotherapist
- Exercise Physiologist
- Occupational Therapist

Some organisations have information or helplines to help you manage your condition. including pacing.

## Things to Remember

Pacing is all about balancing activity and rest to bring about improvements in the way you feel. Life is unpredictable, so however thoroughly you might plan your time you can still be caught out by the unexpected. Because of this it's important not to work right up to the margins of what you can sustain – leave a bit of a gap or cushion so that you can deal with any activities that come out of the blue

## Resources

NSW Health Pacing Guide [https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/623833/Pacing-guide.pdf](https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/623833/Pacing-guide.pdf)  
NSW Health Boom and Bust Cycle Guide [https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/623830/Boom-and-bust-guide.pdf](https://aci.health.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/623830/Boom-and-bust-guide.pdf)  
NSW Health <https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/painHEALTH-pacing-guide-worksheet.pdf>  
<https://www.emerge.org.au/?s=pacing>  
<https://www.ehlers-danlos.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/pacing-for-people-with-me-booklet.pdf>

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