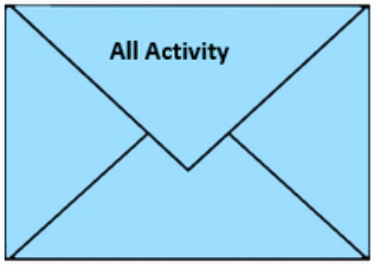
The Big & Little Envelopes

Pacing involves discovering and adjusting to the limits imposed by our conditions. You can think of your limits in many ways - this way is called the Big and Little Envelopes.

The Big Envelope

The first way is in terms of your overall activity level. We call that limit the “energy envelope” or the “Big Envelope”. It may seem like your envelope fluctuates widely from day to day, but it changes only gradually. Large daily fluctuations suggest you are in the push and crash cycle.

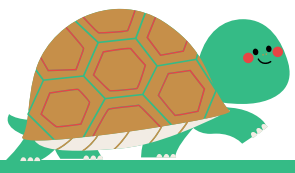
The key to improvement is keeping inside your envelope or ‘sustainability’, which means finding the level of activity you can sustain each day for an extended period of time such as a week and gradually adjusting your life to fit within that envelope.



The Little Envelopes

The second way to think about limits is in terms of specific areas in your life. We suggest you look at six:

- **Physical activity:** Activities such as bathing and dressing, chores, cooking, gardening, shopping, walking and driving.
- **Mental activity:** Activities that require concentration, like reading and working on the computer
- **Social activity:** Time spent with other people
- **Sleep and Rest:** The quantity and quality of sleep needed at night and rest during the day.
- **Physical sensitivities:** Allergic reactions to food and other substances, vulnerability to noise and light, and sensitivity to weather and the seasons.
- S**tress and Emotions:** Finances, strains in relationship intensify stress. Changes and uncertainty trigger strong feelings.



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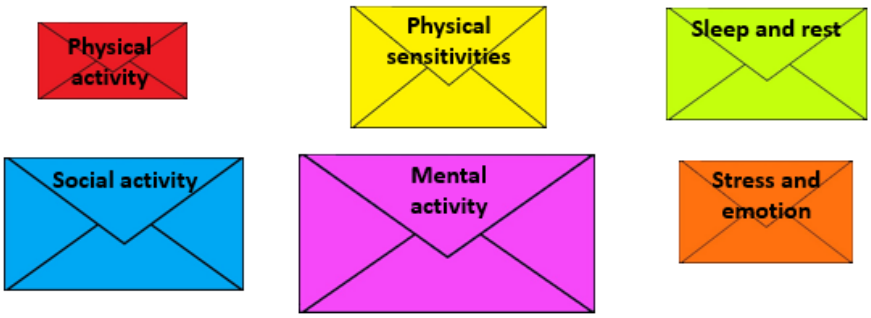
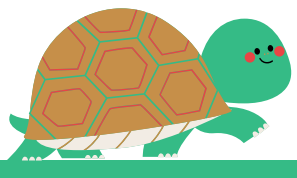


You may find that the energy you have for the different envelopes isn't uniform. Some little envelopes are bigger or smaller than others – and also that they might fluctuate in size over time. The less energy you have for an aspect of your life is represented by a smaller envelope. In this example, the physical envelope has shrunk the most whereas mental activity is not affected.

Figuring out which areas in your life your energy is most restricted can be the first step to trialing pacing strategies that might make the biggest difference to your symptom level and stability.

Emerge ACT have a number of courses and worksheets that can help you figure out the size of your big and little envelopes and tailor your life to fit within them.

Information in this factsheet is adapted from "Managing Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia" by Bruce Campbell.
This factsheet is part of our Club Tortoise program for pacing with energy-limiting conditions.



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