

Pacing yourself

Information for patients

The “resting and rushing” cycle

Many people find that they have good and bad days.

When you have a good day you may be tempted to rush around, doing lots of activities, like housework or gardening.

When you have a bad day you may do very little for a few days.

Good days and bad days can then develop into a cycle of good and bad days, called the “resting and rushing” cycle.

The effects of the “resting and rushing” cycle

- Increased pain
- Decreased fitness
- Reduced success
- Reduced confidence
- Increased stress
- Low mood.

Breaking the “resting and rushing” cycle

You can begin to lead a fuller life if you develop **PACING** skills. You can pace any activity.

1. Decide on an activity / goal, you want to pace
2. Decide how much of this activity you can do on a bad day, this is your baseline
3. Do this amount of activity every day, good and bad days, for a week
4. Don't do any more, even if you feel good
5. If you have managed to do this amount of activity every day plan your increase
6. Try to increase the activity by 20% each week.

Don't suddenly do a lot extra, as this will often cause the vicious cycle to start again.

An example of pacing

- Activity: walking
- Your baseline might be 5 minutes
- Walk for this time every day
- After a week increase this to 6 minutes. The next week, do 7 minutes, and so on.
- Keep increasing like this until you reach your goal.

Key points for pacing and achieving your goals

- Decide on an activity / goal
- Find your baseline
- Be realistic
- Gradually increase your activity
- Plan your increases
- Be consistent, even on the bad days.

Exercise and pacing

Exercise has numerous benefits:

- Improves range of motion
- Improves muscle strength
- Improves balance
- Improves fitness
- Improves mood

However, you must remember to **PACE** any exercise. This means doing activity little and often, which helps smooth out resting and rushing. You may find it useful to keep a record of your activity, so you can see what you are doing and gradually increase it.

How much is too much?

If following an activity, you are in pain for more 2 hours; you have probably done too much too soon. In this case you should reduce your level of activity down to a more manageable level.

Results of pacing

- Reduced pain
- Improved fitness
- More success
- More confidence
- Reduced stress.

Further Information

Video explaining pacing

www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPsWYO-kWdU



Ten Footsteps to Living Well with Pain

Excellent for guiding you through the pacing theory and take more control in managing your pain.

<https://livewellwithpain.co.uk/resources-for-people-with-pain/ten-footsteps-to-living-well-with-pain/>



This leaflet was compiled by the East Lothian Outpatient Physiotherapy Department in association with the Patient Information Leaflet Group, NHS Lothian Physiotherapy Service.

Ref: Lothian.Pacing.Sept.2025

It's OK to Ask

When you understand what's going on with your health, you can make better decisions around your care and treatment.

www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/its-ok-to-ask/

