

# Fatigue: 'Pacing' as a Strategy



**Information for Patients**  
Musculo-skeletal Service  
Physiotherapy Department  
Community & Therapy Services  
North and North East Lincolnshire



## Introduction to Pacing

Pacing is a positive way of how to maximise your energy with daily tasks. Pacing means spreading out activity and alternating it with rest periods so that you are able to continue for longer. For example:



Pacing is not about doing less activity, but spreading tasks out so that you can complete them more effectively.

Key tips for pacing:

- Take regular rest periods
- Spread activities / or one activity throughout the day
- Challenge your ideas about the task and different ways to break it down

Three strategies for Pacing are the 'Three P's':

- **Plan** your activity in advance
- **Prioritise** your tasks for the day, think - do these tasks all have to be done today?
- **Pace** – always remember to break down your activity by having regular rest periods. Remember 'little and often'.

A few examples of how to pace with common daily tasks include:

- **Cooking:** By planning what you are having in advance can enable you to break the task down into more manageable chunks. This could be that you sit in the kitchen to prepare the meal, take a rest period, cook the meal, rest prior to washing the pots or loading the dishwasher and resting again afterwards

- **Washing and dressing:** It might be useful to sit down whilst washing, making sure that all your toiletries are in one place for easy access, putting your socks, shoes and trousers on whilst sitting and then standing only once to pull them up. Another strategy could be to shave at a different point in the day, when you have had a rest period. By having a towelling dressing gown, this could save on energy spent drying your body with a bath towel

It is important to remember that pacing activities does not only include tasks such as hobbies and going out, but can also incorporate day to day tasks such as washing and dressing, cooking and walking down the stairs.

## What is meant by a rest period?

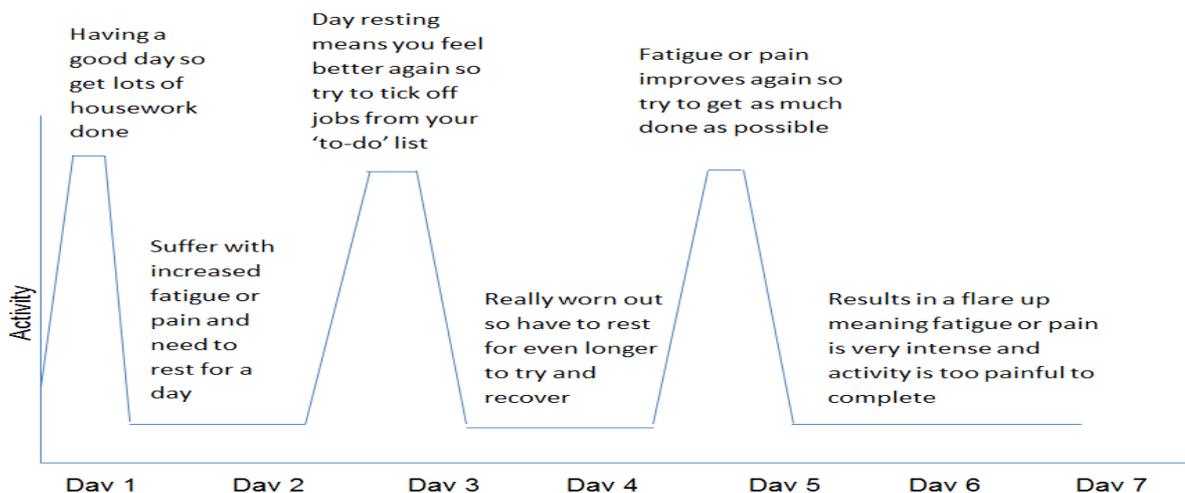
Good quality rest periods is essential in being able to pace. Everyone is different, so the amount of rest time will depend on the individual. Some people have a short 10 minute break whereas others require 30 minutes. There is no right and wrong answer, it is about finding out what works for you.

Examples of rest could include; relaxation, lying on the bed, mindfulness, sitting in a quiet room or space and breathing techniques.

## Boom and Bust

For a lot of people they have good and bad days, meaning that some days you are more active than others. On a good day you may try to do more, which can lead to 'overdoing' it. As a result of this you may experience a number of 'bad' days and be unable to complete tasks you would wish to do.

The graph below demonstrates how this might happen.



Your MSK Physio / Occupational Therapist can discuss this information further with you, and set individual goals around pacing and managing your fatigue.

## Any Comments, Compliments, Concerns or Complaints

If you have any other concerns please talk to your nurse, therapist or doctor. Our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) are available on 03033 306518 (Grimsby, Scunthorpe and Goole). You can also contact [nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net](mailto:nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net).

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