

Patient information

Chronic pain self-management Pacing and goal setting

Often, people with chronic pain get into a cycle of overdoing things on a good day and doing very little on a bad day. Over time, the good days become less as the bad days become more frequent.

Examples of habits which are unhelpful if you have long term pain:

Doing things
when you feel
like it

Sitting down
for long
periods

Doing jobs
all in one go

Doing all
housework in
one day

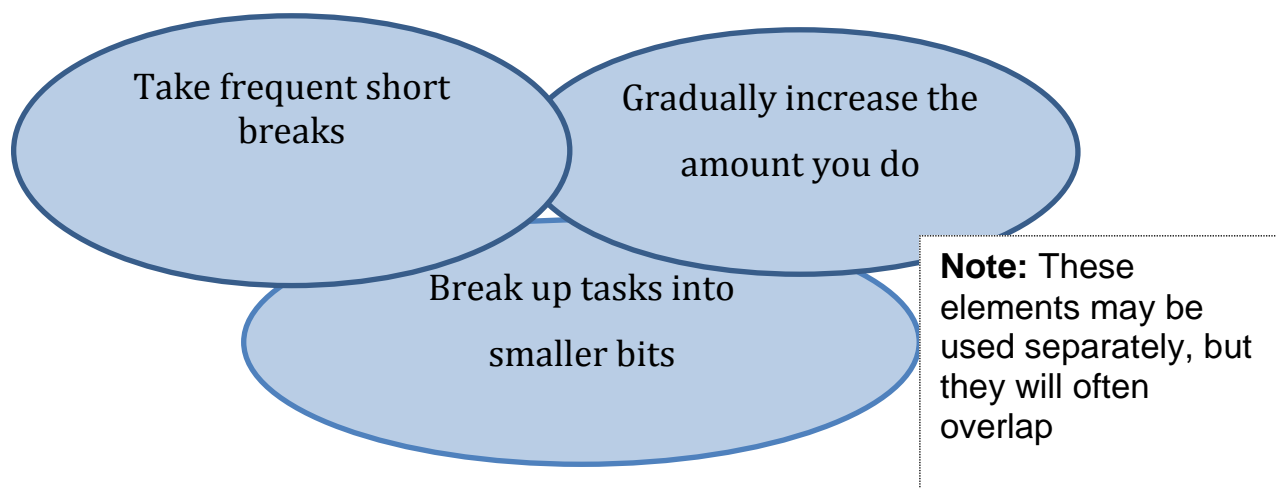
Why set a pace?

- Pacing is an essential technique for mastering chronic pain and often involves taking a break before you need to.
- Pacing may reduce the severity and duration of flare ups.
- Pacing may reduce feelings of frustration and low mood through repeated pain flare ups.
- Pacing may reduce risk of medication overuse and adverse effects from this.
- Over time people are less able to cope with activity and smaller amounts of activity produces an increase in pain.
- Pacing may reduce the risk of losing physical condition.

How to pace

The aim of pacing is to achieve and then maintain a fairly even level of activity energy levels throughout the day, rather than, for example, trying to do everything in the morning and then having to rest all afternoon. **Pacing is not all about stopping activities you enjoy.**

There are three main elements to pacing:



Pacing should be applied to all your activities, work and leisure.

Pacing can be a tricky skill to learn as we naturally want to try and keep up with our family and friends.

Pacing activities step by step

Before being able to pace yourself you need to establish baselines, or time limits for activities.

Finding a baseline/time limit

Choose an activity, for example, sitting, standing or walking. Note the length of time you are comfortably able to do this. Your baseline will be half this time.

Breaking down tasks

Many activities may seem daunting but can be broken down into steps or stages.

For example, cooking a meal can be broken down into separate stages. Baselines can then be used in each stage.

1 Collecting items and ingredients required (walking for x minutes)

- 2 Preparation of ingredients (sitting for x minutes, or standing for x minutes before changing position)
- 3 Cooking (standing for x minutes before walking or sitting)
- 4 Laying the table (walking for x minutes)
- 5 Eating! (sitting for x minutes, standing or walking a little before returning to sitting)

An example of a pacing plan:

Start date	Activity	Baseline	Goal
Week 1	Walking e.g. with the dog	10 minutes	Increase by 2 minutes every week
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			

You can use the blank plan at the end of this document.

Remember

By using a baseline for your abilities you can organise activities to time and not to pain, giving you more control. You can carry out tasks that previously caused you discomfort with more ease. The baseline should be used on 'good' days and 'bad' days; initially you may find it hard to limit yourself on good days!

Using a baseline leads to improved tolerances and achievement when used with goal setting.

Goal setting

Having chronic pain can lead to a reduction in activities carried out; either from those activities increasing the pain, or through anticipation of the activities increasing the pain. You may also have found that previous attempts to increase your activity on good days have left you feeling worse later, both because of the pain and because of a sense of failure.

Goal setting is about identifying what you would like to be able to do and working towards achieving it. Goal setting has been shown to be a powerful way for people to

improve their quality of life and sense of control. It is important that goals are personal and meaningful to you and feel good.

Aims or long term goals

First identify what you would like to be able to do, for example:

- Gentle stretches twice a day
- Walk to end of street and back
- Return to work
- Enjoy going to the cinema
- Get the weekly shopping at the supermarket

If your goals seem general, such as:

- Improving walking
- Improve social life

Try to form them into more specific goals such as:

- To walk to friend's house
- To meet up with friends at least once a week

These goals then need to be broken down into smaller achievable steps. Each step needs to be achieved before moving on to the next one.

Short term goals

Short term goals are your route to achieving your aims. Keep putting in little steps until they are achievable.

Try to make the goals:

- **Specific:** Clearly set what you would like to happen.
- **Measureable:** Will you easily be able to say if it was achieved?

- **Achievable:** Are you able to do the task you set yourself?
- **Realistic:** Are you going to do it?
- **Timely:** Consider 'is this the right time to do this?' Also, set yourself a time limit.

An example of goal setting

- **Aim:** To walk to a friend's house.
- **First short term goal:** To establish a baseline for walking, using guidelines given, by the weekend.
- **Second short term goal:** To walk outside for the baseline time (for example 10 minutes) twice this week.

After completing these you can add in further steps to get to the main aim.

The next step may be:

- After x number of days/weeks increase walking time by two minutes or;
- To walk for a total of 20 minutes with a break of five minutes or;
- To walk baseline time more frequently (three times a week – alternate days – every day)

Further hints for goal setting

- Consider areas that you want to change or improve.
- Try not to set your goals beyond your capabilities, but on the other hand don't underestimate your ability.
- Try not to make your goal dependent on too many things (people, weather etc.) – they may let you down and then you will not have succeeded in your goal.
- Think positively. Use the skills you learn in the Pain Management Centre to help you.
- Plan your goals carefully – use the blank plan at the end of this document.

- Write down your goals. It will help you to remember and when you have achieved your goal you can tick it off.
- You can set yourself more than one goal, and in lots of different areas.
- Don't panic if you don't achieve your goal. Think about why. It maybe that you need to add in an extra step/short goal or two.
- Reward yourself when you achieve a goal.
- Ensure that your goals are not determined by pain levels.
- If pain interferes with you achieving your goals, re-assess them. Were you trying to progress too quickly, jump stages, not really followed the plan, or was the goal just a little too ambitious in the time frame?

Remember

By goal setting you can:

- Improve your self-esteem, confidence and mood
- Gain more control over your life
- Improve the quality of your life
- Give yourself a purpose



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<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



Pacing Plan

Start date	Activity	Baseline	Goal
Week 1			
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			

Goal Setting

Goal(s).....

Day/Date	Goal Achieved?	Problems Identified	Plan
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			