

IMPORTANCE OF PACING

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Chronic pain can be overwhelming, and it can be difficult to believe that we can work with our pain. One of the most important interventions we can consider is *pacing*.

Pacing requires that you actually pay attention to the pain closely and clearly so that you can begin to identify activities and lifestyle issues that can trigger intense pain cycles. Many times we think we know how much we can handle, and many times we are wrong.

There are many reasons why we do not see our limits clearly and pace ourselves:

- We don't want to disappoint family and friends.
- We were able to do it yesterday.
- We are having a good day and do not pay attention to the body.
- We ignore the body.
- We refuse to accept what is (this is different from resignation).
- We have obligations.
- We are trying to manage intense feelings such as anger or depression that tend to cloud our ability to see clearly.
- We decide to push through pain.
- We start to wonder if we are weak.
- We feel it would be easier to continue an activity than to explain to others.
- We haven't taken the time to determine our limits.

Remember that we spiral downward into an intense pain cycle when we don't pace our activities.

- Use a log to keep track of activities, time spent, pain level for one week only – any longer and we can become too focused on pain – try to notice the actual physical sensations such as pressure, burning, twisting, or throbbing rather than thoughts or judgments about the sensations.
- Use a watch with a timer.
- Discuss limits in advance with family and friends.
- Do not overestimate your tolerance.
- Schedule rest time.
- Work on acceptance of your level of ability.
- Do not judge yourself by other's expectations or opinions.
- Do not judge yourself by your own unrealistic expectations or opinions.
- Give yourself permission to pace appropriately.

PACING SELF-CARE

You are not your pain

People tend to get overwhelmed by pain and forget that they can sometimes influence pain levels as well as their states of well-being by paying attention to the mind and body. During those times when you feel you can't think about self-care, remember that the pain will not stay at a high level, breathe, and try not to be self-critical.

Physical needs

- Are you resting as you should?
- Are you eating nourishing foods?
- Do you take time to check in with your body?
- Do you listen to what your body needs?
- Do you go outside into nature?
- Do you use soothing physical techniques such as massage, swimming, gentle yoga, or acupuncture on a weekly basis? (even hand massages by a spouse or friend)
- Do you breathe deeply into the belly?
- Do you use good body posture/mechanics appropriate for your history and condition?
- Do you change position as often as you should?

Emotional needs

- Are you spending time with others, even for very short periods?
- Are you scaring yourself with negative thoughts?
- Are you aware of when you feel angry, sad, or scared?
- Are you depressed and do you need treatment?
- Are there people you can go to for support?
- What makes you happy? Are you making time for this?
- Spiritual needs
- Are you spending time developing your spiritual beliefs, whatever they may be?
- Are you reading or listening to inspirational messages?

REMEMBER THAT THE SIMPLE THINGS CAN HELP

We often rely on medical interventions to feel better. Remember that simple things can help.

- Rest
- Water
- Nutritious food
- Music
- Laughter
- Hugs
- Crying
- Watching children play
- Sitting in nature
- Simple exercise – e.g., head roll or shoulder shrug
- Watching a favorite movie
- Bath
- Heating pad
- Calling your doctor
- Calling a friend
- Calling a group member
- Allowing yourself to feel bad today
- Books on tape
- Photographs
- Prayer
- Breathing
- Guided imagery
- Tea/herbal
- Pets
- Hobbies
- Fresh flowers
- Candles
- Incense – aromatherapy
- Inspirational affirmations or books
- Keeping a healing basket by your bed filled with items that are soothing