

The following excerpt was taken from the “Peer Support Group Leader Training Manual for Chronic Pain” developed by Dr. Melissa Geraghty, Psy.D., Director of Mental Health and Support at the U.S. Pain Foundation.

How to Pace with Chronic Pain

Pacing is a crucial concept in managing chronic pain, emphasizing the need for individuals to balance their activities and energy levels to avoid exacerbating pain and fatigue. It involves consciously regulating and structuring one's daily routine and tasks to prevent overexertion and minimize the risk of triggering flare-ups or worsening symptoms. By pacing activities, individuals can effectively manage their energy reserves, optimize their functional abilities, and maintain a consistent level of activity without exceeding their physical limitations. Pacing should not be confused with fear avoidance which is when individuals drastically modify or restrict their activities due to a fear of exacerbating pain or worsening their condition, often leading to a cycle of decreased physical functioning and increased distress.

The concept of pacing is further highlighted in the comprehensive resources provided on the Millions Missing website. The guides they offer have valuable insights and practical strategies for individuals navigating the challenges of chronic pain and fatigue, particularly in the context of conditions such as myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) and Long COVID. These manuals emphasize the significance of developing a pacing plan tailored to individual needs, considering factors such as pain levels, energy fluctuations, and specific symptom triggers unique to each person's experience.

The following Pacing and Management Guides can be found on MEAction.net. Check out meaction.net/resource/pacing-and-management-guide/

- Pacing and Management Guide
- Pediatric Pacing & Management Guide
- Clinician’s Pacing and Management Guide

Pacing techniques often include establishing a structured daily routine, breaking tasks into manageable segments, and incorporating regular rest periods to prevent the depletion of energy reserves. Some suggest the utilization of adaptive tools and assistive devices to facilitate task completion with minimal strain and fatigue, enabling individuals to conserve energy and optimize their functional capabilities. This could include, but is not limited to, using a wheelchair at the airport even if you do not use a wheelchair daily.

It’s also suggested to prioritize activities based on their importance and impact, encouraging individuals to allocate energy to tasks that align with their personal goals and values while delegating or modifying tasks that may be more physically demanding or less essential. By adhering to the pacing strategies and recommendations, individuals can develop a sustainable and effective approach to managing their chronic pain and fatigue, fostering a sense of empowerment and improved overall well-being.

A well-known metaphor used to explain the limited energy and resources individuals with chronic illness have each day is called “The Spoon Theory.” It was created by Christine Miserandino. In this theory, "spoons" represent units of energy, and individuals must carefully manage their spoons to accomplish daily tasks. It emphasizes the importance of prioritizing activities and making conscious choices to conserve energy. The Spoon Theory has become a widely recognized concept in the chronic illness community, helping to raise awareness about the challenges individuals face and fostering empathy and understanding among those who do not experience chronic illness themselves. Check it out here:

butyoudontlooksick.com/articles/written-by-christine/the-spoon-theory/