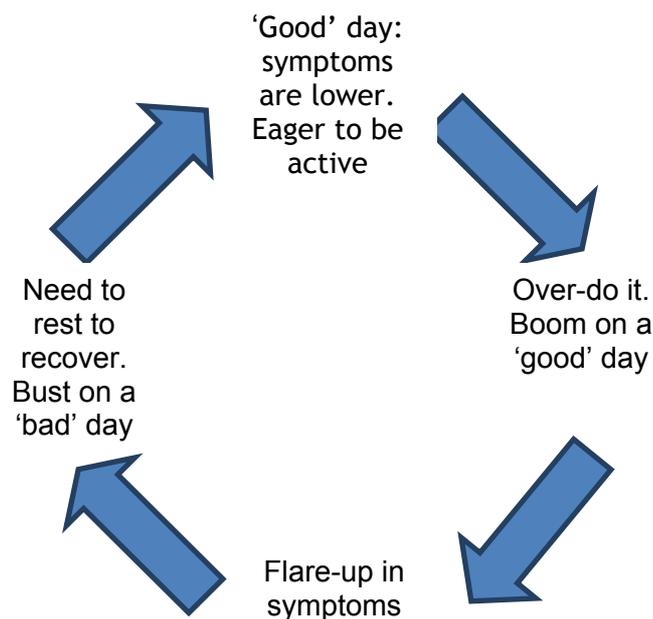


Activity Pacing

People with long-term pain or fatigue can sometimes over-do activities on 'good' days when their symptoms are lower. This can lead to a flare-up in symptoms and a period of rest may follow on the 'bad' days. This pattern of high levels of activity followed by low levels of activity is called the boom-bust cycle:

Boom-Bust Cycle



If you continue to go round the boom-bust cycle, you might find that you need longer to recover. Over time these periods of rest can lead to reductions in your fitness level, and you may notice that your activity levels get lower. You might start to think that you cannot do that activity, or that the activity is harmful and that it should be avoided.

However, it is not that you cannot or should not do these activities, it is just that you are trying to do too much of them, or too soon.

Here are some of the reasons people give for over-doing things on a 'good' day:

- "I feel like 'me' again"
- "There are loads of jobs that need doing, so I try to make up for lost time"
- "I don't know when I'll get another good day so I try and do as much as I can"
- "I feel great at the time"
- "It gives me a sense of achievement"
- "It makes my family happy"
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Over-doing things usually means that you have to rest more on your 'bad' days because you have more symptoms like pain and fatigue. This can affect your mood too. For example, when asked about how they feel on their 'bad' days people often say things like:

- "I feel depressed"
- "I feel frustrated"
- "I'm never going to get better"
- "I'm a burden. It's not fair on my family"
- "I think I may have damaged my body"
- "I need to rest and let my body recover"
- "I feel like I have no control over my daily life"

As you can see from the above list, as well as leading to a gradual loss of fitness (because over time you do less), over-doing things and then resting too much can have a big influence on your thoughts and emotions.

It is important that you try to break the 'boom/ bust' cycle. Activity pacing can help to break the boom-bust cycle and stay active.

Activity Pacing

The aim of pacing is to maintain a fairly even level of activity over each day, and to create more 'good' days and fewer 'bad' days. There are different aspects to pacing:

1. Work out what you can manage now

Try to assess your current activity levels to work out what you can manage now without causing a flare-up in your symptoms.

Try not to compare yourself with other people, and try not to think about how much you used to do, or feel you ought to be able to do. This might mean that you have to accept a slightly lower level of activity as a starting point. Remember, you are trying to work out a realistic amount that you can do now.

2. Adjust your current activity levels if necessary

You might need to adjust your activity levels to help you to get started with activities that you have not done for a while. You can adjust your activities by:

Taking regular, short breaks

Do something for a set time, then take a short break, then do a bit more, then take another short break, and so on. For example, if you do 30 minutes of housework, but then have to lie down for a few hours, try doing 15 minutes of housework, taking a 15-30 minute break, and then continuing for another 15 minutes. This way you will have still achieved the same total amount of housework, but you will not have over-done things and ruined your whole day. A rest can include sitting or undertaking a relaxation activity, rather than necessarily going to sleep.

Breaking large tasks up into smaller pieces

If the whole task is too much for you to do in one go, try breaking it up into amounts that you can manage. For example, if you used to do all of your housework in one day, try breaking it up over 2 or 3 days. Perhaps do downstairs one day and upstairs the next.

Alternating your activities

If your symptoms increase when you are doing a certain task, alternate this with a different task, or an activity that places you in a different position. Remember that different tasks can affect you in different ways, for example, physical tasks may be tiring if your fitness levels have decreased. However, social activities (for example, sitting to talk to friends/family) and cognitive activities (thinking activities, for example, reading) can be emotionally or mentally tiring. Change your position regularly to help to manage your symptoms.

3. Plan your activities

Most people find it helpful to write their plan down and keep track of how they are doing. Writing things down helps you to see whether you are making progress or slipping back. If you think you are slipping back, try to work out why this is happening and what you can do about it.

Activity diaries can be used to:

- i. Structure and plan your individual activities, over each day and for the week.
- ii. Review the demands/benefits of existing or new activities.

Set realistic goals

As you plan your activities, set yourself realistic goals that you know you will be able to achieve. If the goal turns out to be too easy, you can always set a more challenging goal next time.

4. Be consistent with your activities

Once you have set a realistic amount of activity, stick to it! This will require two main rules:

- Do not over-do things on a 'good' day
- Still try to undertake activities on a 'bad' day (you may need to adjust your activities on a 'bad' day, but doing some activity on a 'bad' day will help you to recover from your flare-up of symptoms)

5. Be assertive!

Sometimes you might need to say 'no' to other people if they are placing demands on you that you currently cannot manage. Alternatively, you might need to ask for help, or delegate some tasks so that you do not over-do things.

6. Gradually increase the amount you do

To begin with, it can sometimes feel like you're going backwards because you are doing less than before. Try not to get frustrated. When you get used to pacing your activities, you can start to do more. To 'pace up' an activity you should plan to do a bit more gradually. Depending on the activity this might take weeks or months. Each increase should be small and you should not do more than you planned, even if you feel like it. Over time you will be able to do more than you could before, and you are less likely to trigger a flare-up of symptoms.