



Patient & Family Guide
2020

Pain and Pacing Daily Activities

Pain Self-Management Program

Aussi disponible en français : *Faire des
tâches à son propre rythme* (F85-2164)



www.nshealth.ca

Pain and Pacing Daily Activities

What is energy management?

Pain lowers your body's energy resources.

Energy management is a way to manage your body's energy levels.

- › It includes different ways of using and saving energy so that you do not make your pain worse or cause a flare-up.
- › It helps you do important activities by lowering the amount of energy your body uses.

What is your activity style?

People with chronic pain may have activity styles that increase their pain. These activity styles are known as:

- Boom-Bust
- Pain as your guide
- Combination approach

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

Boom-Bust (overdoing)

Boom-Bust has 2 parts.

Part 1 is the **boom phase**:

- You push through an activity or day of activities to get them done.
- You get early warning signs of pain or fatigue (tiredness), but you ignore them.
- You keep going until you either finish the activity or until you cannot handle the pain or fatigue.

Part 2 is the **bust phase**:

- You crash or have a flare-up of pain and need time to recover.
- Recovery can last for hours, days, or weeks.
- During this phase, you may not be able to do even basic activities, like showering.

With the boom-bust activity style, you may think you are getting more work done by pushing through activities (boom phase), but you are actually doing less because of the time spent in flare-up and recovery (bust phase).

What can happen if I follow the boom-bust activity style for a long time?

- The point at which you flare up will come sooner, with less activity.
- Your flare-up will last longer.
- You will have more bad days than good days.

Pain as your guide (underdoing)

In this activity style:

- You do an activity until your pain starts to get worse, then immediately stop.

OR

- You do not want to cause yourself pain, so you stop before it hurts.
- Over time, you can do less and less activity before pain starts.

What can happen if I follow the pain as your guide activity style for a long time?

- You will not be able to do as much physical activity.
- You will feel more pain with less activity.

Combination approach

You use a combination of boom-bust and pain as your guide:

- You use the boom-bust activity style on good days and pain as your guide on bad days or when you have a flare-up.

OR

- You use the boom-bust activity style for important activities and pain as your guide for less important activities.

What do all 3 activity styles have in common?

- The pain is in control.
- You cannot do as much activity over time.
- These activity styles do not help you to manage your pain or take part in more activity.

Pacing

What is pacing?

Pacing is an activity style that helps you control chronic pain by managing your energy. Pacing focuses on **balance**:

- Balancing activity with rest
- Balancing light and heavy activities

What are the benefits of pacing?

- You do activities within your pain and energy limits
- You can do more activity and have less pain

What are the goals of pacing?

- Living a more balanced lifestyle
- Doing regular activity without flaring up your pain
- Doing more activities over time
- Having less pain and fewer flare-ups

With pacing, you start by doing a regular amount of activity over time. This is your baseline. Then slowly you do more activity to help your ability to do more without causing a flare-up.

Pacing allows you to do more activity over time instead of less. Pacing is more successful when you increase your activity by small amounts.

There are 3 pacing strategies:

- Working within your baseline
- Breaking down activities into smaller parts
- Do-Rest-Do

Working within your baseline

What is my baseline?

- › Your baseline is the amount of an activity that you can do each day, on a good day or a bad day, before taking a break and resting or doing something else.
- › It is the amount of activity that you can do regularly and know that it won't cause a flare-up.
- When you find your baseline and stay at that level of activity for a while, the same amount of activity gets easier. **This pacing strategy helps you do more activities overall, even though it may take longer to do them.**
- You will have a different baseline for each activity you do.

- When you know your baseline for an activity, you can use it to tell you when to stop, instead of pushing through to finish the activity. This prevents you from overdoing the activity and causing a flare-up.
- Think of your baseline as a starting point to help you better manage your energy, pain, and activities.

How do I find my baseline?

There are 3 ways to find your baseline.

1. Cut what you're doing in half

- If you spend 20 minutes on an activity, 10 minutes is your starting baseline.

2. Activity average

- Choose an activity to find your baseline for (like standing to wash dishes).
- Write down how long you are able to do the activity on different days and at different times of the day (such as 20 minutes, 40 minutes, 30 minutes). This will help to show both good and bad days.

- Find the average of the time spent on the activity (for example, $20 + 40 + 30 = 90$ minutes. 90 minutes divided by 3 = 30 minutes. **30 minutes is your average.**)
- Divide the average time in **half** = use this as your baseline for this activity (30 minutes divided by 2 = **15 minutes. This number is your baseline for standing to wash dishes.**)

3. Activity log

- You may not know where to start to find your baseline. You may do a lot of activities over the day and not know which ones are causing your flare-ups. An activity log can help you see the amount of activity you do each day or week.
- An activity log can help you to identify patterns of activity and how they affect your pain and energy levels.
- To complete the activity log, write down your daily activities, how long you spent doing each activity, and how you felt afterwards.

Worksheets

Use the following worksheets to figure out your baseline.

Cut what you're doing in half

Activity	Day and time	Time spent on activity	Cut 'time spent on activity' in half to get your baseline

Note: If cutting your time spent on an activity in half still causes you to have a flare-up, try cutting that time in half and see if that works as your baseline instead.

Activity average

Activity: _____

Day and time	Time spent on activity	How do you feel? What was your self-talk?

Average time = _____

Baseline (divide by 2) = _____

- Make a plan to change these activities to make them easier to manage. For example: break the activity down into smaller steps, lessen the time spent on the activity before resting, or change the position you use to do the activity.

Activity	Plan: how will you change the activity for next time?	Result

Plan to change

How do I increase my baseline?

Once you have been using your baseline regularly without flare-ups, you can think about increasing your baseline.

- Plan your baseline increases ahead of time and only increase one activity at a time.
- Start by increasing your activity by 10% and see how you feel. For example: if your baseline for an activity is 10 minutes, increase it by 10% (1 minute). This means doing the activity for 11 minutes and seeing how that feels over several days.
- It is important to give your body time to adjust to changes in your baseline. You may have mild symptoms as you challenge your body, but they should get better after a couple of days.
- If you have a big increase in pain, your body is not ready to increase your baseline. Go back to your old baseline until you are comfortable in that activity again. When you feel ready to try again, try increasing by a smaller amount.

Breaking down activities into smaller parts

- Most activities can be broken down into smaller, more manageable chunks.
- Keep breaking down the activity until you can do each part.
- You may look at activities as a whole, such as getting ready in the morning or making dinner. But when you break activities down into smaller parts, they can be easier. For example:
 - › Getting ready in the morning can be broken down into washing your face, brushing your teeth, brushing your hair, getting dressed, etc.
 - › Making dinner can be broken down into preparing the chicken, chopping the carrots, chopping the potatoes, spicing the vegetables, cooking the chicken, etc.
- Looking at activities as a whole can make them seem too big or overwhelming and you may not know where to start. This pacing strategy can help. Breaking down activities makes them easier to do.

- It may take longer to do things, but you will have energy left over to do more and not cause a flare-up.
- You will feel better because you are finishing more small tasks instead of not being able to finish big ones.

Do-Rest-Do

Do-Rest-Do means changing between activities to prevent a flare-up.

- This allows you to rest the part of the body that has been active and give it a chance to recover before going back to the same activity.
- Finding your baseline for an activity can help you know how long you can do an activity before you should rest.
- There are different types of rest. You can:
 - › change positions (such as from sitting to lying down with your feet up).
 - › switch between tasks with different mental or physical demands (such as from banking to sweeping).
 - › balance between light and heavy tasks.
 - › take longer breaks.
 - › use a relaxation strategy (such as deep breathing or meditation).

This pamphlet is just a guide. If you have questions, please talk to your health care provider. We are here to help you.

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.