

Chronic Pain

Managing Activity Levels

The way a person feels and their expectations affects their pain, and in turn the pain that they experience affects how they feel. It is better to take a balanced approach to your activities, so you don't burn-out or become completely inactive. You need to take an active interest and involvement in the management of your pain, breaking the vicious cycle of feeling worse and doing less. It is important that you spot the things that make your pain worse and find ways to make this happen less often. Learning what to do when your pain is worse will also help you cope better.

Plan how you intend to start an activity and how long you will do it for. Just as an athlete in training, you can then gradually build this up to a level which you are happy with. This pacing of your exercises helps you to introduce things in a controlled and responsible manner. Pacing really does work - you can stay motivated by continually achieving a series of small goals.

- Pacing involves breaking down an activity into manageable chunks and taking some time out between each chunk to rest and relax. By dividing up tasks in this way you can keep an eye on how you feel and how you are getting on with the task.
- Set yourself positive goals which are realistic, specific and measurable you will begin to see how you are progressing.
- Prioritise your activities so that you are achieving things in the order that you would like to. Also if you are finding things difficult then you can have finished the tasks most important to you.
- Exercise whenever possible, this will not only keep you fit and take your mind of things, but may also help you feel better.

The longer you have had pain the harder it will be to start being active. But the benefits far outweigh doing nothing. So, work out your baseline – that is what you can do and for how long before causing a flare up. This could be a simple activity like how long you can stand and cook for, or driving time, gardening or walking the dog.

Example	Activity/Exercise
How long can I garden for before my pain increases?	I can garden for 60 minutes but I won't be able to do anything the rest of the day.
Can I garden for 40 minutes	Probably not, I think I will still be sore without pain?
30 minutes of light gardening tasks?	Probably
20 minutes of light tasks?	Definitely

So, for gardening your baseline would be 20 minutes of light gardening tasks.

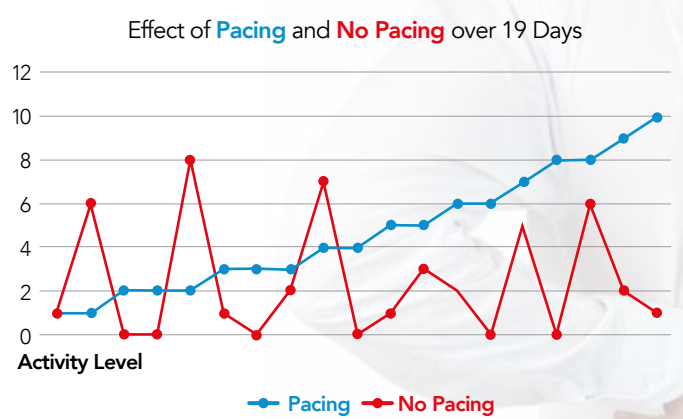
Use this example to plan your activity or exercise and work out your baseline. If you continue to exercise at your baseline level, you are unlikely to make progress. You need to gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. This is called pacing.

Pacing is a planned approach to increasing your level of activity. It should not make your pain worse. If you know your baseline then you can increase your level of activity in several ways by:

- increasing the time you spend doing the activity
- increasing the number of times you do an action
- increasing the 'hold' of an exercise
- increasing the resistance or weight you are lifting/pushing during an exercise
- reducing the rest time between each exercise/activity.

Most commonly people start by increasing the time they are doing an activity for. Increasing in small increments, be it 1 minute every third day for example, may

seem too little. However it is better to move slowly and eventually reach your goal rather than take two big steps forward and end up five giant leaps backwards. With each increase you have to judge how your body responds, and from there increase slowly again. Even if you are feeling good restrain yourself from doing more than your daily target.



Record your activity and progress each day. As the increments of progression are small it can be hard to see the improvements daily. But over time this record will show your achievement

Remember though that your day is not just filled with your one goal activity or exercise. You may have other things to do in the day which will impact on your exercise, your pain and fatigue. Keeping a record of all the activities you do in the day along with your goal exercise will allow you to see where you may have overdone it on a day being too busy – where possibly the exercise was not to blame.

If you know for example you have a really busy day then don't increase your activity/exercise that day or even take a 'rest' day from exercise. It's all about pacing yourself and learning your limits.

Use a pain scale to record how you feel each morning and evening. You will soon see a pattern of where you went wrong and over did it, or where you have good days and build on replicating those.

Working Out Your Baseline

Set a Goal

I would like to be able to _____
for _____ minutes a day

(choose an activity or exercise be it walking the dog or swimming, a yoga class)

Ask yourself the question realistically what can you manage pain free

At the moment if I _____ (the activity/exercise)

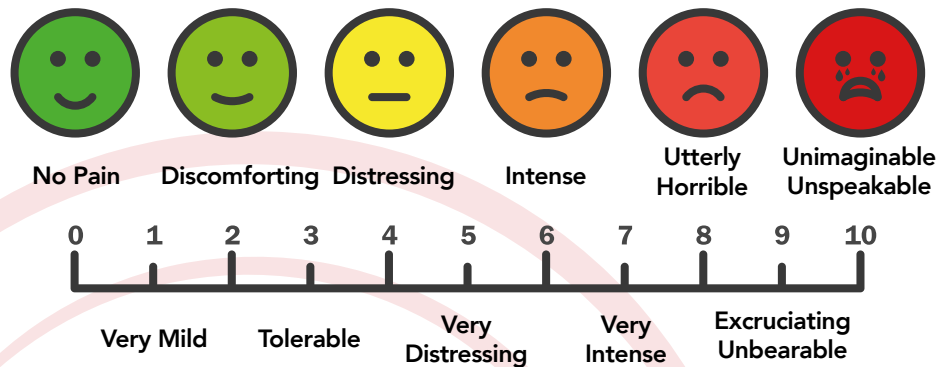
For _____ minutes I will not be able to do anything else the rest of the day or even tomorrow

For _____ minutes I will be sore and need to rest

For _____ minutes I may be sore

For _____ minutes I know I can do without pain flaring up

Once you have worked backwards to the point where you know you can manage without pain – that is your starting point, your baseline.




We have produced a blank Diary Template similar to the example below, that you can print and fill out yourself each week. You can find it at the same place you obtained this leaflet (or if this leaflet was given to you by a therapist, ask the therapist for a copy).

Daily Activity Diary (example)

Week [insert the number of the week ie. if this is the first week you've kept a diary – insert 1]

Date [insert the date of the first Monday of the week]

	Morning Pain Score	Work Commitment	Chores & Errands	Social	Exercise & Activity	Evening Pain Score
Monday	3	6 hours sitting	Post office	Barbecue with friends	Baseline <u>10</u> mins walking	7
Tuesday	4	6 hours computer			Planned <u>10</u> mins Achieved <u>8</u> mins	6
Wednesday	2	6 hours sitting computer			Planned <u>8</u> mins Achieved <u>8</u> mins	4 

The information contained in this article is intended as general guidance and information only and should not be relied upon as a basis for planning individual medical care or as a substitute for specialist medical advice in each individual case. ©Co-Kinetic 2019