

Pacing

Pacing is a form of activity management. It is the ability to set your day at a speed that is right for you. This includes managing physical, cognitive and emotional activities. It is taking a balanced, steady approach to activity. Pacing can help to reduce the frequency or the severity of symptoms.

Pacing can help you:

- Find your safe baseline for activities
- Build consistency - avoid the push-crash cycle.
- Maintain function or improve function in a sustainable way
- Reduce crashing / flare-ups.

What is PEM?

PEM (Post Exertional Malaise) is specific to ME/CFS. It is the worsening of symptoms and function as a consequence of exertional activity in which the cellular energy capacity was exceeded which can occur up to 24-48 hours after peak exertion. If PEM is induced, it is crucial that you rest until it resolves.

How to get started with Pacing?

Pacing is a process and often implemented gradually by making small changes over a longer period of time. You can check in with yourself before, during or after an activity to evaluate how you are doing. The following questions can help to structure the tools and skills that you use:

1. **What is my energy capacity (today, right now, tomorrow...)?**
2. **Is my body supported during this activity or rest?**
3. **Is a stress response impacting my energy?**

Depending on the answer you can plan ahead, pace in the moment or plan for recovery time.

What is my energy capacity?

Many people find that this can be a very changeable thing. Your energy levels might change from day to day. In order to build your awareness on how much energy you have available for activities you can use different tools.

Ask yourself: "Where is my energy at?" Or "How can I be gentle with myself in this activity?"

- **Using a log to track symptoms and energy levels**
Understanding the flow or pattern of your symptoms and what triggers a symptom response can be really helpful. Here is a link to some [logging ideas](#).
- **Use a heart rate monitor**
Using a heart rate monitor can give you immediate feedback on how efficient you are using your energy. You can find more information [here](#).

- **Energy analogies**

Analogies can help you understand the concept of energy better. It can help you keep track of your own energy or to find language when talking to others about your symptoms. For example think of your energy as battery power.

What can you do?

During that ongoing process of determining where your energy is at, you can use different pacing strategies that can help you to stay within your available energy or to minimize impact when you start to push outside the available energy. *Limiting activity to available energy.*

Rest:

Increasing rest in your day can seem impossible. Rest does not only mean to be in a horizontal position in a quiet space. Rest extends to recovery behaviour in all energy types (physical, cognitive, emotional). Keep in mind that there are two types of resting

- **Pre-emptive rest:**
Rest before you feel you need to. It should feel like you could keep going. This is the moment to rest. It will be more efficient. You are allowing your body to keep up with your energy expenditure. Build rest break into your day.
- **Recovery rest:**
This is the rest you have to take. Your body needs to recover after you pushed outside your available energy, often other symptoms will increase as well. It takes longer to recover. This is less efficient.

A good place to start is using Microbreaks. Anything from 5 minutes or less. It might just be 30 seconds. It does not always have to be a long period of rest to make a difference. Shorter and more frequent rests are often easier to implement.

Reduce Activity

It can be difficult or unrealistic to not do activities. In order to reduce activities, you can try and

- Simplify
- Delegate
- Eliminate

Break up Tasks

Break up tasks as much as possible to get the best balance of activity and rest.

Example: Household management

- Break up bathroom cleaning into separate steps instead of doing it all at once. You could clean the sink, rest, clean the shower rest etc.
- Break up meal preparation. Can you clean the vegetables, rest, chop some ingredients (while sitting). You can put prepared ingredients aside and shift to another activity or rest. Complete the cooking later in the day.

Is my body supported during this activity or rest?

You can check in with yourself before, during or after an activity or rest break in order to avoid awkward postures or repetitive movement. Arranging items for accessibility, keeping body mechanics in mind and using equipment when appropriate.

Ask yourself: "Is my environment working for me or against me in this activity?"

Even when you don't need equipment all the time it can be good to have it available as backup on a hard day.

Example: Getting ready to leave the home

- You might use a shower chair on days when showering would be too exhausting otherwise.
- Using a shoe horn to avoid awkward bending. Sitting down to put on socks and shoes

Reducing stimulation can help to save energy if you have a sensitivity to environmental stimulus – like sound, light, smell or touch. It can be difficult to control your environment in regard to sensory stimulus.

Example: Loud noise or bright lights when outside of the home

- Try using sunglasses, hats or activating blue light filters on your devices.
- Try earplugs, noise cancelling headphones or reducing background noise, like the radio when driving.

Is a stress response impacting my energy?

Our body has a natural, healthy mechanism for responding to perceived threats (stress), called the Fight, Flight or Freeze response. Being in an alerted state or stress response will activate protective systems in your body. It can use a lot of energy to stay in this alerted state.

You might notice holding your breath or breathing shallow, increase in heart rate or muscle tensing/weakening amongst others.

Ask yourself: "Is my body calm or ready to react?"

Things you can do to calm your body and mind:

- Abdominal breathing and relaxation techniques (Deep Breathing)
- Meditation
- Body scan techniques
- Passive muscle relaxation
- Guided Imagery
- Active gentle movement (yoga, tai chi or qi gong)

If you have experienced trauma in the past, please look for trauma informed exercises. Some types of mindfulness or meditation exercises can be triggering.