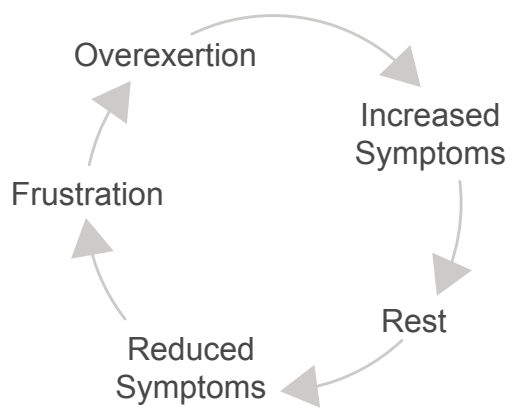


Post-Exertional Malaise in Post COVID-19 Recovery

Some people who are recovering from COVID-19 experience times where they feel exhausted, have difficulty thinking, and other symptoms after a minimal amount of activity – this is known as post-exertional malaise (PEM). These symptoms are similar to “myalgic encephalomyelitis” or “chronic fatigue syndrome”. The symptoms can occur 24-72 hours after activity and perhaps last for days or weeks and therefore are commonly called ‘crashes’.

Some people with PEM experience a cycle of ‘push and crash’. They find themselves caught in a frustrating loop, swinging between over activity and forced rest. When their symptoms are low, they push to get as much done as they can, the overexertion triggers an increase in symptoms, which in turn leads to forced rest or a crash.

Push and crash leads to lack of control, unpredictability and discouragement.



The opposite of push and crash is ‘pacing’. Pacing means that you spread out your activities into ‘little bits’ with rest periods in between the activities. The fact that pacing helps people with PEM suggests that symptoms are not random, but rather due to overdoing activity. If you do more than your body can handle, the result is a worsening of symptoms.

On the other hand, if you stay within your limits, which we call the Energy Envelope, you can gain some control over our symptoms.

Staying within your Energy Envelope offers the possibility of a more stable and predictable life. You can live your life according to a plan, rather than in response to symptoms, and giving you a sense of managing your illness, rather than it controlling you.





The benefits include:

- Less intense symptoms
- Less suffering
- More stable and predictable life
- Sense of control
- Less time needing to rest
- More time being able to do what you like
- Chance for improvement

1. Finding Your Envelope

Pay attention to the limits on physical activities but also the limits in other areas, such as mental activity and socializing. You can track (using the forms, logs and worksheets in the resources listed at the end of this handout) what you do each day so that you can see patterns in ‘push and crash’. This will help you find your envelope.

2. Adapting to Your Envelope

Adapt your life so you live within your Envelope. This is a gradual process, usually involving the use of multiple strategies such as tracking the activities and strategies (using the forms, logs and worksheets in the resources listed at the end of this handout) will help you learn when and how to ‘tweak’ your life to control symptoms.

3. Expanding your Envelope

If you are consistent, you may be able to expand your Envelope, doing more without your symptoms getting worse.

Where to go for more information

Pacing: <http://www.cfselfhelp.org/pacing-tutorial>

Energy Envelope Theory:
<https://www.prohealth.com/library/energy-envelope-theory-effective-self-management-tool-cfs-91722>

Logs, Forms & Worksheets to track your activity & symptoms:
http://www.cfselfhelp.org/library/type/log_forms_worksheets

Remember that practicing diligent pacing strategies and staying within your energy envelope is an effective way of managing post-exertional malaise.