

Fatigue in Post COVID-19 Recovery: Pacing



Why is pacing important?

Following COVID-19, you may find you have less energy than you did before. Everyday situations that require physical, cognitive (thinking), and/or emotional stamina may be exhausting.

You may also notice that if you “push through” your symptoms, and ignore what your body is telling you, you will feel worse.

While over-exertion is not necessarily dangerous, it can lead to an unhealthy pattern where you “go until you can’t go any more” and then “crash” with worsened symptoms. This would force you to rest and spend a lot of time in the “comfort zone”.

In this handout, you will learn how to avoid the “push and crash” pattern and start more manageable routines.

What is Pacing?

Pacing is a set of strategies that can help you reduce the big ups and downs in your symptoms, energy, and participation in activity.

Pacing is about being smart about how you use your energy. It can be helpful to think about your energy as money in your bank account. Just like money, you need to budget your energy so it doesn’t run out unexpectedly, and you have enough energy throughout the day, and week, to participate in the activities that are most meaningful and important for you.

How to Pace Yourself

Reflect on what activities in your life are “energy boosting” (e.g. a walk in nature or quality time with a friend) and “energy draining” (e.g. calling your insurance company or shopping at a busy store).

Some activities, such as exercise, may take energy but they are a good energy “investment”, because over time they help increase your energy “budget”. Once you are more clear about your “energy boosters” and “energy drainers”, the next step is to be strategic about how you prioritize, plan, and pace these activities.



Plan:

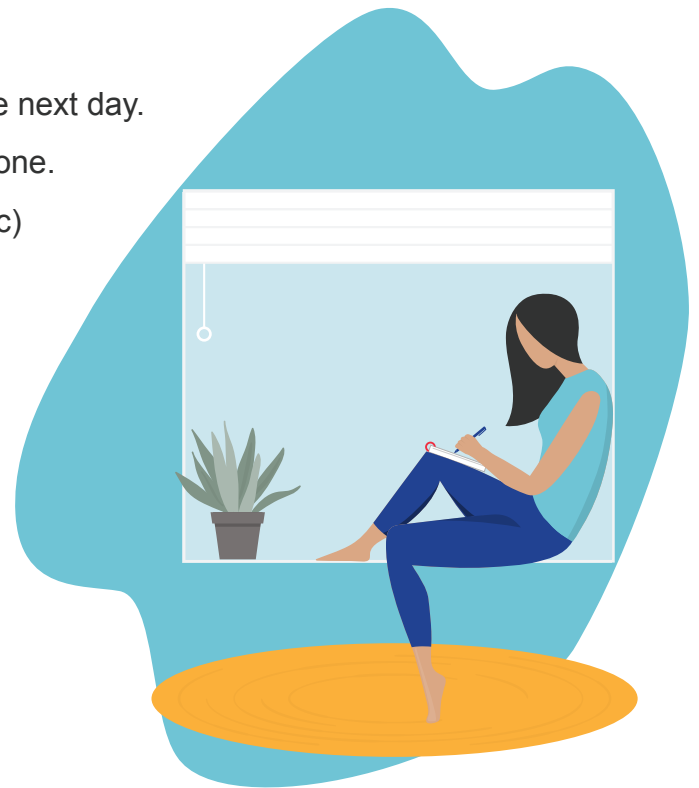
- Take time each night to review the day and plan the next day.
- List activities and schedule tasks that need to be done.
- Schedule in breaks (activity-break-activity-break etc)

Pace:

- Break up a large task by doing a little every day.
- Plan to take your brain break before you feel tired.
- Spread your “energy drainers” over the week.

Prioritize:

- Decide which activities are most important to you.
- Invest your energy wisely.
- Schedule in “energy boosting” activities.



Taking Action!

If you think pacing is something you could be better at, here are some ideas on how to take action.

1. Identify your activity pattern by recording your daily activities and energy levels for one week.
2. Reflect on what you find. Do you have too many “energy drainers” in your day, and not enough “energy boosters”? Are there big fluctuations in your energy ratings day to day and you are falling into the pattern of “over-doing” and “crashing”?
3. See if you can use the information you collect to improve your activity pattern the following week and to allow for more stable energy ratings from day to day.
4. Create an Action Plan. For example, your action plan could be to buy a day planner and schedule in your “to do’s”, appointments, and energy boosting activities.

You can use the following activity log:

<https://concussion.vch.ca/assets/documents/Activity-Tracking-Sheet.pdf>

Remember that practicing diligent pacing strategies and staying within your energy envelope is an effective way of managing fatigue.