

Managing Fatigue in Post COVID-19 Recovery with Pacing

Post-COVID-19

Interdisciplinary Clinical Care Network

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Why is pacing important?

After getting COVID-19, you may find you have less energy than you did before. Everyday tasks that need physical, cognitive (thinking), and/or emotional effort may be exhausting.

You may notice that if you “push through” your symptoms, you feel worse. This is often called overexertion.

Overexertion can lead to an unhelpful pattern where you “go until you can’t go any more” and then “crash” with worsened symptoms. This can force you to rest and may result in spending a lot of time stuck in bed or unable to go out.

This handout includes some tips on how to avoid the “push and crash” pattern and start better routines.



What is Pacing?

Pacing is a way to approach activity so that you can reduce the big ups and downs in your symptoms.

Pacing means being smart about how you use your energy. Think of it like how you manage money in a bank account – like “budgeting” your energy so that it does not run out. You can spread your energy out over days, weeks and months. This will make sure that you have enough energy to do the things that are most meaningful to you.

How to Pace Yourself

All activities take some form of energy (physical, cognitive, or social/emotional/spiritual) and are therefore “energy draining”. Different activities may drain different types of energy. For example, vacuuming may drain physical energy, reading a book may take cognitive energy and having a friend over to dinner may drain social energy. Different activities may also drain different amounts of energy. For example it will likely take more physical energy to mow the lawn than it would to cook dinner.



The only way to increase energy in your “energy bank account” is by frequently stopping and resting. You must balance your “energy spending activities” with “energy saving activities” in order to stay within your “Energy Envelope”. Your “Energy Envelope” is the amount of activity you can do without your symptoms worsening. For more information visit http://www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19_Post-Exertional_Malaise.pdf.

How you **prioritize, plan, and pace** these activities can help you stay within your “Energy Envelope”.

Prioritize

- Decide which activities are most important to you and do these first.
- Invest your energy wisely.
- Schedule in rests.



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).
- Do your activities when you feel best (e.g. if you feel better in the morning schedule your most difficult tasks for the morning).

Pace

- Break up a large task by doing a little every day.
- Plan to take a rest break before you feel tired.
- Spread your activities over the week.
- Consider using a heart rate monitor or an activity journal to help you to plan and track your pacing.

For more information visit http://www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19-How_To_Manage_Your_Effort-Daily_Activities_and_Exercise.pdf.



Tips to get started

1. Record all the activities you do for at least 2 weeks and record how they make you feel
2. Group your activities into essential (have to do) and non essential (nice to do or someone else can do for you) tasks.

3. For the essential tasks apply the “4Ps” of – Plan, Pace, Prioritize, Position – and see if you can improve your activity pattern the next week to allow for more stable energy from day to day.
4. For the non essential tasks apply the “3Ds” of – Delete, Delegate, Defer.
5. Using an activity log can be a helpful tool to help you track your daily activity and energy.



Where to go for more information

PHSA Symptom Journal:

www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19_symptom_journal.pdf

PHSA Fatigue and Pacing video:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=12azPbZoOZs

PHSA Introduction to Living in Your Energy Envelope Tool:

www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19-Intro_to_the_Living_in_your_Energy_Envelope_Tool.pdf

PHSA Living in Your Energy Envelope Tool:

www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19-Living_in_your_Energy_Envelope_Tool.pdf



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

For more information on how to support your understanding and management of symptoms as you recover from COVID-19, please visit www.phsa.ca/health-info/post-covid-19-care-recovery



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