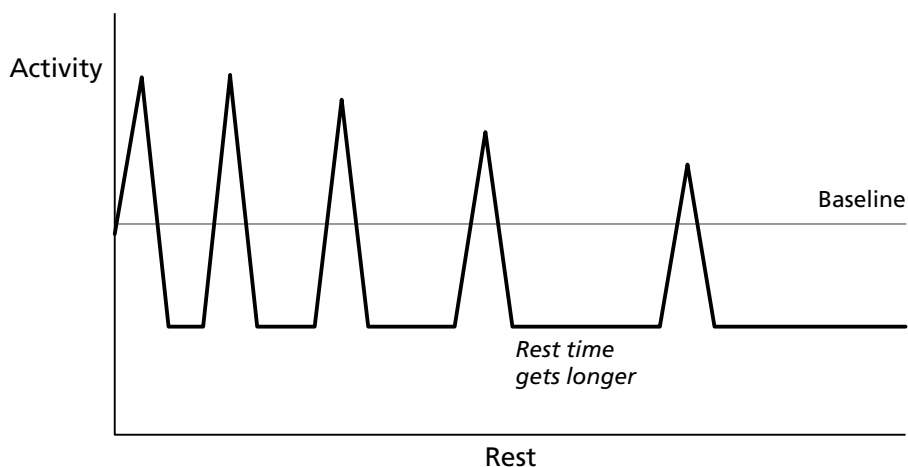


Pacing – how to manage your pain and stay active

Information for patients



The longer you have pain the harder it can become to keep regularly active. You may find that, on good days, when your pain is not too bad, you may overdo some activities. This can lead to increased pain, which then means that you have to reduce your activity for the next day or so. This is called the 'Boom and Bust' or 'Over and Under activity' cycle. Over time, this can lead to you avoiding activity and you may begin to notice that you are becoming less and less active.



This cycle of events can be changed by a plan of action called pacing. The aim of pacing is to gradually help you to balance out your levels of activity and rest.

The first stage is to work out your baseline activity level. This is the amount of activity that you can do knowing that your pain won't flare up.

A flare up is an increase in pain, often suddenly, that prevents you from doing any activity. It can last for hours or days.

Once you have worked out your baseline you will be able to start exercising at a level which is manageable and doesn't cause you to have a flare up. You can then gradually increase the level of exercise.

How to find your baseline

Try to think of a few activities that could cause your symptoms to start, such as standing, cooking, driving, gardening, etc. We will use the example of gardening.

How long can I garden before I have a flare up?

I can garden for 60 minutes but I'll have a flare up for a day.

Can I garden for 40 minutes without flaring up?

Probably not, I think I will still be sore.

30 minutes of light gardening tasks?

Probably

20 minutes of light tasks?

Definitely

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

Think of other activities that you would like to do during your day and apply this technique to find your baseline for those tasks.

Pacing – the road to success

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
- reducing the rest time between each exercise/activity.

Choose one of the above which suits your activity and make a plan of:

- when you will start to increase your exercise
- how much you will increase it by each time
- how regularly you will make the increases
- when you will re-measure your baseline.

Remember to make a record of your achievements. This will help you to plan the next step in your exercise programme.

Example: Gardening

Let's say your baseline is 4 minutes:

Week 1			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
<i>4 mins</i>	<i>4 mins</i>	<i>4 min 30 secs</i>	<i>5 mins</i>
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>5 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>6 mins</i>	<i>6 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>7 mins</i>
Week 2			
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
	<i>7 mins</i>	<i>7 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>8 mins</i>
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>8 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>9 mins</i>	<i>9 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>10 mins</i>
Week 3			
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
	<i>10 mins</i>	<i>10 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>11 mins</i>
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
<i>11 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>12 mins</i>	<i>12 mins 30 secs</i>	<i>13 mins</i>

After 3 weeks you would have raised your baseline by 9 minutes.

To avoid a flare up, make sure you feel comfortable before you increase your activity by 30 seconds. Try to avoid flaring up but don't worry if you do. When you feel able, restart your plan at a level where you feel comfortable or start again at your original baseline.

Important note:

You may feel that 30 seconds is too much or too little, therefore consider increasing your activity time by 20, 40 or 60 seconds, depending on what feels correct for you.

Do not do more than your daily target for that day, even if you feel good. This is to reduce the risk of overdoing it and flaring up or progressing too quickly and flaring up. However, you should do the extra time of activity even if you are not feeling up to it. This way you will gradually increase the amount of activity you are able to do. This process is a challenge and does require some willpower.

You should try to balance your day with periods of rest and periods of activity. Pacing will help you manage your day better and, by keeping to your target, means you will be more in control of how much you do. The aim is to maintain a balanced level of activity over the day and week.

Your personal baseline measure and activity planner

Try to think of an activity that would cause your symptoms.

How long can I before I flare up?

I can for minutes but I'll have a flare up afterwards.

Can I for minutes without flaring up?

Probably not, I think I will still be sore

..... minutes?

Probably

..... minutes?

Definitely

So for your baseline would be minutes.

Use the diary below to record your increase in activity through pacing

Week 1			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Week 2			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Week 3			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Week 4			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Week 5			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Week 6			
Baseline	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

Questions and how to contact us

Physiotherapy Department, Horton Hospital

Tel: 01295 229 432

Trauma Physiotherapy Outpatients, John Radcliffe Hospital

Tel: 01865 221 540

Physiotherapy Department, East Oxford Health Centre

Tel: 01865 264 970

This leaflet is designed to be used alongside the advice given to you by your Physiotherapist. It is not designed to replace their advice.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Authors: Murray Stewart, Senior Physiotherapist
Huw Jones, Senior Physiotherapist

April 2015

Review: April 2018

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust

Oxford OX3 9DU

www.ouh.nhs.uk/information

