

Remember:

Be kind to yourself, recovery takes time and progress can be seen in small steps. If it helps, keep a diary of your activities. Over time you can look back and see how far you have come

Elements of this information are adapted from RCOT How to manage post-viral fatigue after COVID-19: Practical advice for people who have been treated in hospital (May 2020)



St Helens and Knowsley
Teaching Hospitals
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Occupational Therapy: Energy Conservation, Pacing and Fatigue Management advice

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Document Number: STHK1432
Version: 002
Review Date: 31/08/2023

What is Energy Conservation?

Energy conservation is a technique that can help you adapt the way you complete your daily activities so that you use less energy, feel less tired and put less strain on your body. It can also help you to adapt your environment to provide the best support when carrying out day to day activities. Energy conservation techniques aim to improve your quality of life by helping you to conserve your energy for activities you want to do, as well as those you feel you have to do.

How can it help me?

When you have been inactive, even for 24-48 hours, your body becomes weaker, this is known as being 'deconditioned'. Regaining lost abilities, such as the strength and stamina to complete daily activities, can often take twice as long as losing them.

By developing energy conservation skills you can reduce the amount of energy / effort, and therefore oxygen, which your body uses when completing everyday activities. This can result in reduced feelings of fatigue, pain and breathlessness. Therefore, when completing activities you will be more comfortable and have increased self-confidence and independence.

Remember:

Energy is like money in the bank; to be spent wisely.

Repeated over-spending can put you in debt physically and mentally as well as financially.

The following examples of energy conservation techniques are a combination of ideas from clinicians and patients who have found their own ways of effectively adapting their skills and coping with activities of daily living.

Shopping

- Planning reduces stress, make a menu planner / shopping list
- Use a smaller, shallower shopping trolley to reduce bending
- Ask family or friends to assist with bulky items
- Do not carry all the weight in one hand; distribute the weight evenly between two bags or use a trolley
- Pack perishable and non-perishable foods separately so that non-perishable foods can be left in the car and collected after resting
- Shop online and arrange for supermarkets to deliver your shopping
- Ask for assistance from staff to reach up / down to items, they are there to help!

Gardening

- Use light weight, long handled gadgets to reduce bending
- A folding stool or kneeler can be helpful
- Use a shallow garden basket to transport tools round the garden
- Break down tasks into stages to make it more manageable
- Scatter seeds rather than planting bedding plants
- Make sensible choices about what tasks are important for you to do and what you could have help with

Housework

- Break cleaning into small manageable stages taking plenty of rest breaks
- Use a lightweight vacuum cleaner if possible
- After washing up, let cups and plates drip dry
- Have two sets of cleaning products, one upstairs and one downstairs, to avoid carrying items up and downstairs
- Try to maintain tidiness in your home, it can be frustrating and depressing to live in clutter
- When tidying up and cleaning, try to conduct the activity in a circular pattern so you are not retracing your steps more than necessary
- Use a long handled reacher to assist you in picking things up from the floor
- Ask for assistance with heavy tasks if possible (changing the duvet cover / hoovering)
- Do not use aerosol products around the home and avoid cleaning products which vaporize into the air
- Ensure you have good ventilation and a supply of fresh air throughout activities
- Damp dusting reduces the amount of dust stirred into the air, but if it is particularly dusty wear a mask as a precaution
- Use smaller rubbish bags to avoid having to lift / carry heavier bags, empty them more frequently
- Position the rubbish bin near the front or back door for ease of access
- Let dishes soak in soapy water to eliminate the need to scrub cooked on food

Prioritising, Planning and Pacing

- Apply the 3 Ps (Prioritising, Planning and Pacing) to your daily activities

Prioritise:

- Put your activities for the day in order of importance
- This could mean a whole task (making a drink) or part of a task (being able to stand up for a period of time when showering)

Plan:

- Decide when the activity needs to be done
- Spread out activities you find difficult
- Explain to others what you are doing and why
- Inform others how they can help you
- Build in rewards to keep you going

Pace:

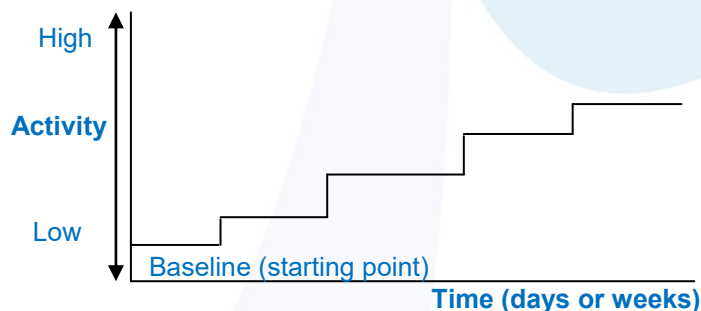
- Pacing means reaching a balanced pattern of varied activity that is achievable on good and bad days
- Break down activities into small achievable stages
- Intersperse work periods with rest periods (rest before feeling tired to reduce recovery time)
- Steadily increase the amount you do and variety of activities over time
- Know your own tolerance levels, your limits will fluctuate day to day and even hour to hour, don't rush!

| If you do too much you may notice: | If you avoid activities you may notice: |
|---|---|
| An increase in tiredness and breathlessness | A decrease in your overall activity level |
| You have to rest because you're exhausted | A decrease in your fitness |
| You experience worse symptoms | Increased fear of your symptoms |

Making Changes

- Make small, gradual changes and only increase how long you are completing an activity for when you are comfortable with the previous level
- Be aware of unhelpful negative thinking on difficult days
- Remember to record and reward your progress and achievements.
- Below is an example of this pattern of activity we are hoping you can achieve with pacing:

Keep to your plan despite good or bad days



Laundry

- Use fabric conditioner to reduce creasing
- Avoid 'pegging out' in times of extreme weather, use a maiden or rotary line to avoid unnecessary reaching
- For smaller items, consider using a circular washing holder to reduce the number of times you are reaching up to the washing line
- Adjust the ironing board to waist height when either sitting or standing
- Use a high stool to perch on if you are unable to sit to iron
- When standing, putting one foot up on a small box can help ease back strain
- Eliminate items that do not need ironing
- It is easier to sit on a small stool or kneel to load and unload the washing machine, remember wet washing is heavier than dry clothing
- If you have difficulty bending, use a long handled reacher to load and unload items from the washing machine / tumble drier

Stairs

- Use the bannister if you have one
- Ascend one step at a time if you find the stairs difficult
- Break it down into stages, for example, climb 5 stairs then rest for 30 seconds, repeat until you have ascended
- If you need to rest for longer that is ok
- By pacing yourself you will have a shorter recovery time at the top of the stairs
- You will not be 'overdoing' and pushing yourself so you will not be exhausting your body

Cooking

- Plan your meals when you're not hungry or tired, then you can ensure you are equipped to prepare well-balanced meals
- As a general rule of thumb, a number of small meals are preferable to a few larger meals
- When cooking, ensure there is good ventilation to let the steam evaporate
- Sit down to complete tasks such as preparing fresh vegetables, wash dishes and to cook
- Avoid peeling vegetables by purchasing frozen or pre-peeled fresh vegetables
- Use a plastic jug to fill the kettle rather than lifting the kettle to the taps
- Position items together e.g. tea, coffee and sugar with the kettle near the fridge
- Position items in easier to reach places to reduce bending and reaching
- If you're able to, cook larger quantities and then divide food into individual portions and freeze them so they are ready for use at a later date
- Break down complicated meals into stages
- Make use of electrical appliances such as blenders, electric tin openers, microwaves and slow cookers
- If you struggle carrying items, use a trolley to transport drinks and food

Benefits of the 3Ps

- Tasks can be completed without making your symptoms worse
- Your mood can improve because you are making progress
- Your physical fitness and independence may improve over time
- As you feel more in control, you will feel less anxious
- At first pacing is difficult, it may take longer to complete activities and this may discourage you. However, it can result in a sense of achievement and independence and this may be a good motivating factor to start you off and encourage you to persevere

General Energy Conservation Techniques

- Keep most items between eye and knee level to reduce bending, stretching and lifting
- Exhale on exertion when carrying out activities
- Do not take on more than you can handle, say no!
- Plan activities so that all required items are to hand before you begin, you are then saving energy
- Simplify activities and eliminate unnecessary steps
- If possible sit to complete an activity, especially if it will take longer than 10 minutes to complete - sitting uses less energy
- Wait until an hour after eating to complete an activity; this is because digestion draws blood, with its oxygen, away from muscles, which leaves them less able to cope with increased demands
- Don't allow yourself to be over burdened by old habits; you can save an amazing amount of energy by adapting your methods

On the following pages are energy conservation techniques for a variety of daily activities, please pick and choose techniques which may help you maintain and increase your independence.

Personal Hygiene

- If possible sit down to undress, wash, dry and re-dress
- When performing activities that mean your arms are above shoulder height, e.g. washing / combing hair or brushing teeth, inhale as you raise your arms and exhale as you carry out the activity. Rest after each exhalation
- If you find steamy atmospheres make your activities more difficult, ensure you use luke-warm water and that the bathroom is well ventilated, leave the door open
- Instead of using a towel to dry yourself, put on a towelling dressing gown and sit down until you feel dry
- Do not stoop or bend forward over the sink, sit down to complete activities at a low level rather than bending
- Electrical gadgets can assist such as shavers or electric toothbrushes
- Use long handled aids to avoid bending down to your feet and reaching to your back
- When showering, aim the water onto your shoulders / chest, rather than over your head as this can increase your shortness of breath and may make you feel anxious when water is running over your face
- If bathing, let the water out of the bath and move from sitting to kneeling before getting out of the bath as this may be easier
- Hair washing is easiest in the shower, alternatively, sit in the bath with a straight back and use a jug or hand held shower unit, if someone can help you, even better.

Dressing

- Gather the clothes you intend to wear in one place near where you dress
- Sit down to dress as it is easier
- Dress your lower half first as this requires most energy and also upper body clothing doesn't restrict your movement
- Reduce the amount of bending you are doing; place your foot on a foot stool, bend your leg and place your ankle on your opposite knee or use long handled aids to reach your feet
- Wear loose fitting clothes that fasten at the front
- Do not restrict your chest or abdomen, for this reason it is suggested that tight bras and belts are avoided
- Wear full slip on shoes or slippers rather than lace ups to reduce bending
- When dressing, if you have a painful limb, dress this first and undress it last
- Wear lightweight separates in the summer to allow body heat to escape and layers in the winter to conserve body heat