

Pacing, Adaptation, and Delegation

Pacing is about conserving your energy over the long haul and not letting the stress of pain and overactivity decrease it. Instead of “sprinting” through an activity, you “walk.” Instead of working harder, you work smarter.

Observe that certain positions (such as sitting or standing) and certain activities (such as vacuuming or combing your hair) may increase your pain. Becoming aware of how long you can stand before your pain goes from a 4 to a 6 can give you an idea of how long you can stand to do the dishes before you sit to pay the bills. Then note how long you are sitting before the pain goes back to a 4. Once you have the idea, you can alternate sitting with standing activities, get more accomplished, and not increase your pain and exhaustion. Use a timer so that the temptation to pay one more bill or do one more dish is limited.

Adaptation is about finding new ways to accomplish old tasks or using devices to help do routine activities. Consider doing dishes with a dishpan at the table or sit while folding clothes, put a bench in the shower, use shoes with Velcro clasps, put large handle grips on kitchen tools and pens, etc. Occupational therapists can help with finding appropriate assistive devices, and also see the webpage:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/assistivedevices.html>, especially the link to the Mayo Clinic information about devices in the home. A trackball on the computer may significantly decrease stress in the arm and neck compared to a mouse, for example. Headsets for phones can also drastically reduce strain on the arms and neck.

Delegation is another way of conserving energy. “If you carry the laundry upstairs, I’ll fold it.” “You clean the bathrooms, I’ll pick up the living room.” Entertain by hosting potlucks. Can’t do a certain task? Ask a friend. They may have something you can do for them in return.

Practical notes:

- Consider using Post-It Notes to describe each task and its time and positioning requirements, then shuffle those on a large piece of paper to organize your day.
- One of our patients has a box of index cards with the tasks needed to clean her house, which she used to do in a blitzkrieg once every couple weeks. Now, she pulls out one card per day, does that task, and returns it to the back of the stack.
- Set a timer on your computer to do a minute of stretching every hour.

It may be difficult for you to take the lead in deciding what you can and cannot do (instead of living up to others’ expectations). However, it is absolutely essential that you take control. No one else can judge what you are able or not able to do.

If you find yourself needing hours or a whole day to recover in between activities, you probably have not stopped an activity soon enough, and you need to practice responding earlier to increases in tightness, fatigue, and pain.

Then

9 a.m. Get up
Pain sensation = 6
Emotional response = 7

9:30 Breakfast

10:30 a.m. Do the dishes, watch TV

11 a.m. Lie down

1 p.m. Get up and eat lunch

1:30 p.m. Work on the car (Pain = 7)

3:00 p.m. Pick up the children

4:30 p.m. Eat dinner

5:00 p.m. Watch TV

7:00 p.m. Go to bed
Pain sensation = 8
Emotional response = 7

Now

7 a.m. Get up
Pain sensation = 5
Emotional response = 3

7:30 a.m. Stretching, relaxation technique

8:30 a.m. Shower, get dressed

9 a.m. Get bills together to pay

9:15 a.m. Wash dishes for 10 minutes

9:25 a.m. Pay bills for 15 minutes

9:40 a.m. Bring laundry down in four small bundles

10 a.m. Log on internet for support group

10:20 a.m. Start wash in washing machine

11 a.m. Finish bills

11:30 a.m. Finish dishes

Noon Eat lunch

12:30 p.m. Put wet clothes in dryer

1 p.m. Peel vegetables for dinner

1:45 p.m. Take wet clothes out of dryer

2:15 p.m. Fold clothes while sitting

3 p.m. Pick up children at school

3:15 – 6 p.m. Watch soccer game

6:15 p.m. Set table

6:30 p.m. Eat dinner

7 p.m. Stretches

7:30 p.m. Help children with homework

9 p.m. Read bedtime story

9:30 p.m. Hot shower and bed
Pain sensation = 5
Emotional response = 3