

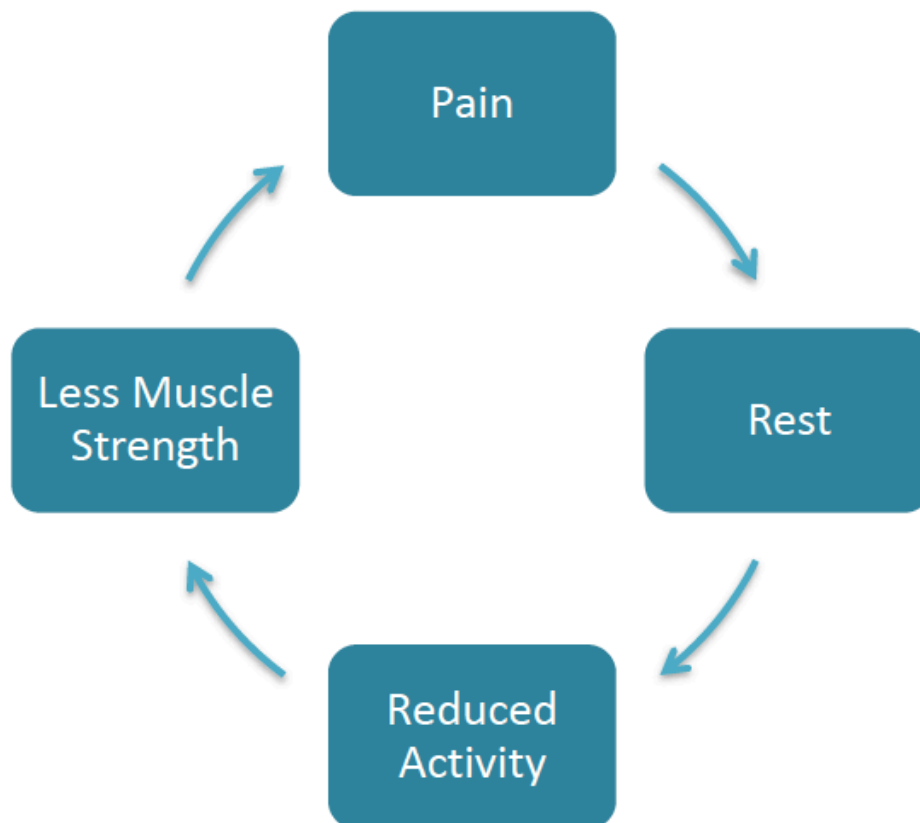
Chronic Pain and Pacing

When you have chronic pain, the amount of energy you have for daily activities, work, or social life is more limited than those that don't have chronic pain.

Pacing is a strategy you can use to help use the energy you have more evenly throughout the day. While some people might need to do *more* and some people might need to do *less*, pacing is important for everyone because it helps to:

- Stop the pain from increasing
- Allow you to keep important commitments to yourself and others
- Keep your mood and outlook positive

People that are **underdoing activity** (moving less because of their pain) are at risk for losing the physical strength to be active.



On the other hand, people that are **overdoing activity** (pushing themselves to do more even when they are not feeling great) are at risk of increasing their pain and burning out.



Pacing means the right amount of both activity and rest to help you feel your best. It will help you:

- **Prioritize:** Since you have a set amount of energy to spend each day, prioritizing the most important or urgent tasks over things that can wait will help prevent you from becoming fatigued or overwhelmed.
- **Plan:** Set a schedule for the day that respects your limits and work within them. This means planning exactly how long you can perform an activity at a time and how much rest you will need in between tasks. This also prevents people that tend to underdo activity from just “going with the flow” which might not encourage them to do more like a set schedule would.
- **Use your body and space appropriately:** Some techniques can drain your energy, such as lifting or extended periods of either standing or sitting. Instead, doing things like changing your working height, pushing/sliding instead of lifting and alternating regularly between sitting and standing can be helpful in keeping your energy levels up.

Pacing Strategies

- Taking time to perform an activity (don't feel rushed)
- Plan break times into your routine (don't wait until you are tired)
- Break tasks into smaller chunks and rest in between
- Use relaxation techniques
- Using stretch breaks
- Telling others about your plans- how long you plan to work and how long you will need to rest

Pacing Example

Pacing and increasing activity gradually go hand in hand. The first step is find a baseline for the activity you want to do- that is how long, on an average day, can you do it before it causes pain? Start by cutting this time in half. For example, if you can walk for 10 minutes before you have pain, use 5 minutes as your baseline and increase gradually from there.

This helps you become time-oriented, not pain oriented.

Here is an example of how you can increase your activity slowly over time. Note that this many take weeks for you to work up to- it depends on what is best for you and it's important you don't try and rush it.

Walk 5 Minutes	Break 5 Minutes	Walk 5 Minutes
Walk 6 Minutes	Break 5 Minutes	Walk 6 Minutes
Walk 7 Minutes	Break 5 Minutes	Walk 7 Minutes
Walk 8 Minutes	Break 5 Minutes	Walk 8 Minutes
Walk 8 Minutes	Break 4 Minutes	Walk 8 Minutes
Walk 9 Minutes	Break 3 Minutes	Walk 9 Minutes
Walk 10 Minutes	Break 3 Minutes	Walk 10 Minutes

Changing Your Perspective on Pacing

Even when you have a good understanding of your limitations, it can be tempting to ignore because of:

- Your old habits/upbringing
- Anger or frustration at having to make changes to your lifestyle
- Believing or thinking that others see you as being lazy or giving up
- The desire to finish a task completely
- Comparing what you can do now to what you used to be able to do
- Your pride (wanting to do a good job)
- Procrastinating on a task (and then feeling rushed to finish it all at once later)

If that happens to you, here's what you can do to improve your pacing abilities for next time:

1. Change your mind about what it means to be successful:

Instead of feeling that success is completing the entire task at once, challenge yourself to view success as stopping before you get tired to prevent you from feeling poorly later on.

2. Use a clock or find someone to help remind you when to go and when to stop:

Sometimes it's hard to remember to take a rest break when you're doing something you love to do. Using a timer will help cue you to take a break, even if you don't feel like you need one at the time.

3. Take pride in respecting your limitations:

Understanding and doing what your body needs you to do (and not do) to feel your best

4. Talk to yourself with respect (stop negative self-talk):

Our thoughts play a big role in influencing our actions. When we think negatively about ourselves, we're more likely to stop taking care of ourselves and withdraw from the things that make us happy. Talking to yourself like you would a loved one helps you let go of judging yourself and embrace accepting yourself for exactly who you are.

5. Analyze what went wrong and make a plan for next time:

Learning from our experience is what allows us to grow as people. If things didn't work out the way you wanted them to, don't beat yourself up about it. Step back, review what happened, and write down what you will do differently next time.