

Pacing for Persistent pain

The purpose of pacing with pain is to help you get things done without setting off your pain protection system. Pacing is the act or process of regulating or changing the timing or intensity of your activity.

Pacing also means doing the activity independent of how one feels, not doing too much or not doing too little. The aim is to maintain an even level of activity each day. Pacing activity will teach your brain that activity that you are doing is safe and that it is not worth sending out a pain signal.

Your ability to Pace will work best if you use this tool together with your other pain management tools.

These can include:

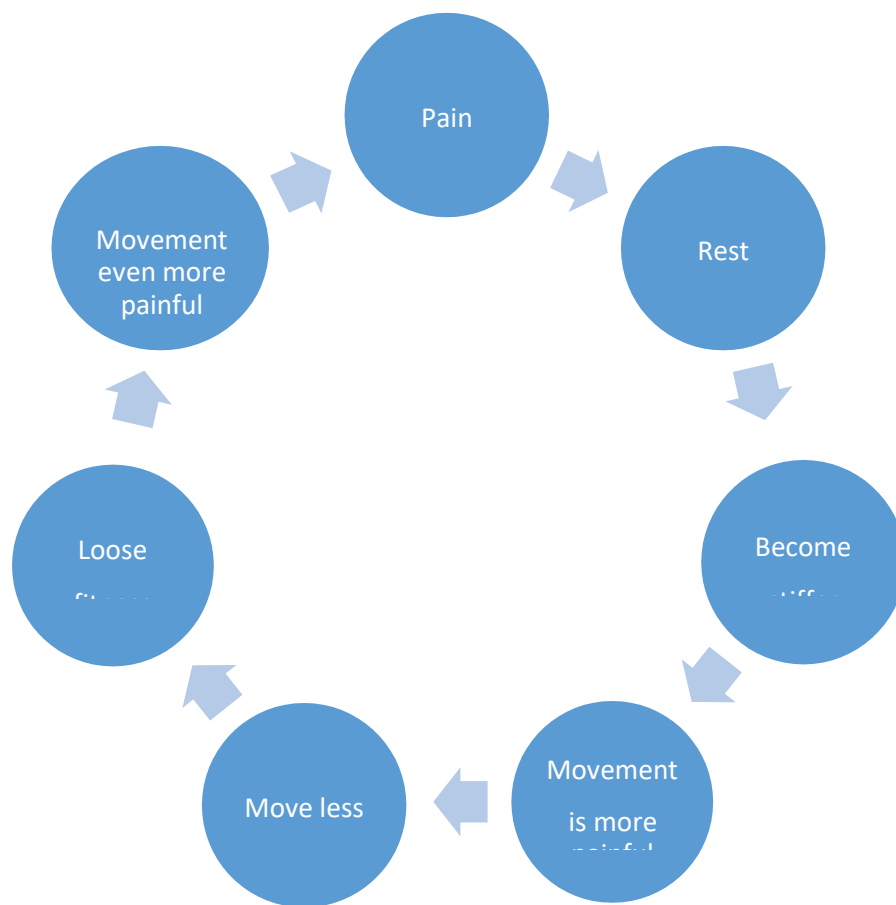
- Breathing comfortably (not holding your breath) when doing an activity
- Practicing good body mechanics when doing an activity
- Adjusting your environment to make it easier to do an activity
- Managing your time well
- Managing emotional stress
- Being as physically fit as you can be
- Eating a nutritionally balanced diet
- Getting a good night's sleep
- Using helpful self-talk
- Experiencing joy in your life.
- Having a sense of purpose
- Taking medications as needed

(Taken from Complex Pain Clinic, St. Paul's Hospital Pacing handout)

Activity patterns for people in pain generally fall into two categories, most people use a little of both approaches to cope with pain

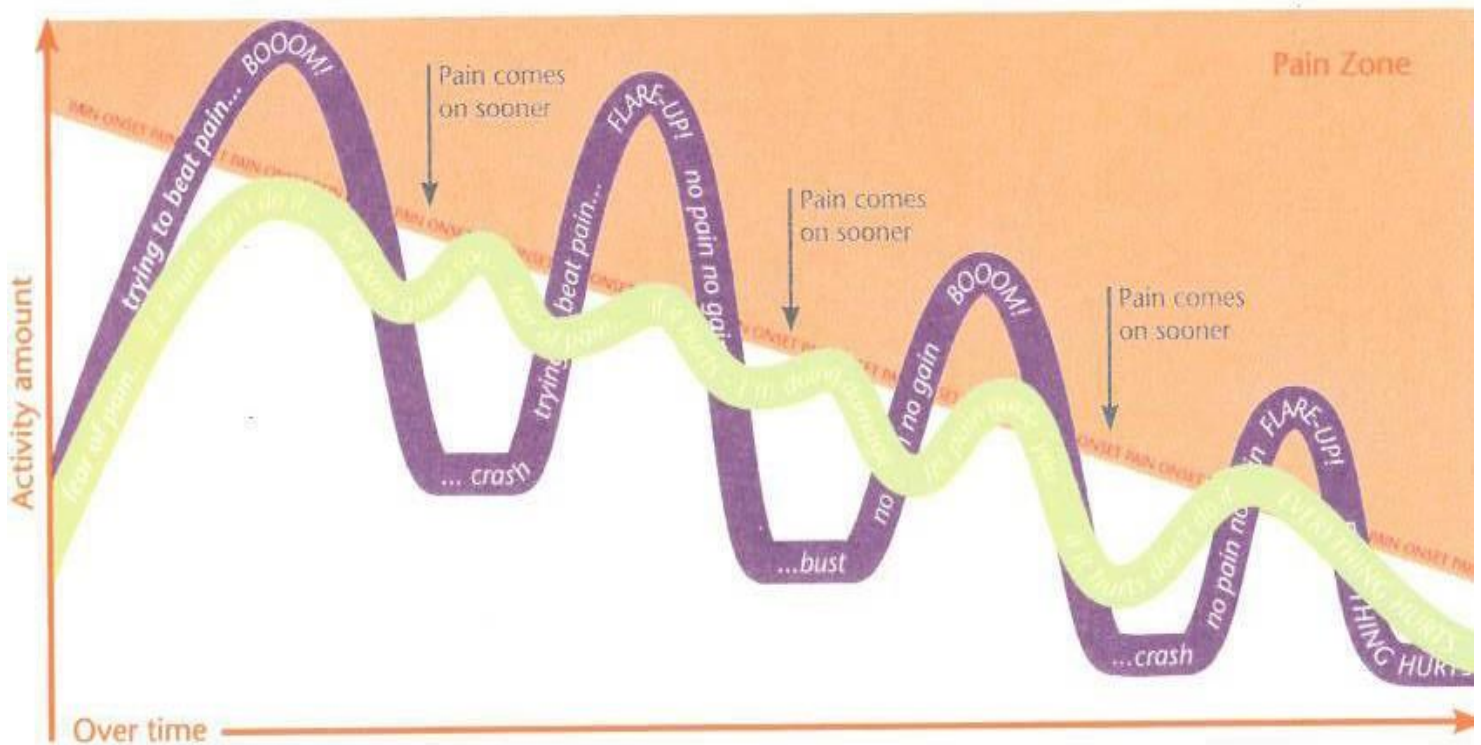
1. Underactivity or the “wait until” approach

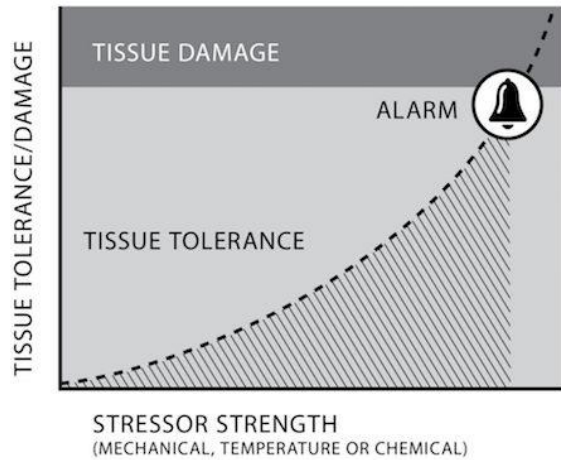
Here you tend to protect yourself by doing less, resting and avoiding activities that you enjoy or would like to do as you wait for the pain to get better. This is not ideal because you not only lose fitness and mobility but also do not live the life you would like. Over time, pain comes on sooner with the same or less amount of activity. This pattern usually comes about when people are afraid of pain. You start to do less.



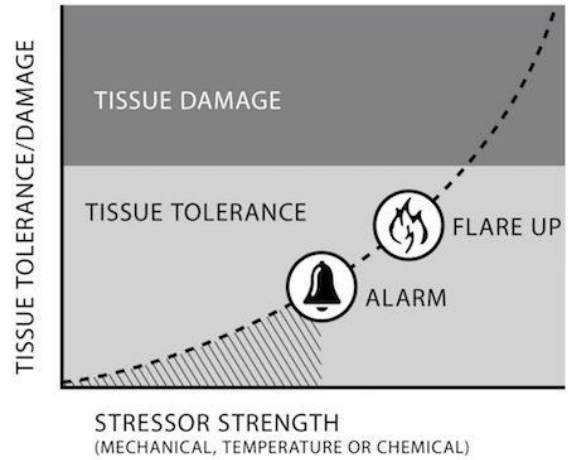
2. Over activity or “Boom and Bust” approach

This is when you choose to be very active and often push past or through the pain alarm. This often ends up having a pain flare and suffering for several hours or days following over-exertion. This is when, despite the pain, you persevere, tolerate it as much as you can, try to ignore it, keep going, distract yourself until suddenly your pain is unbearable and you “bust”. The “bust” floods your nervous system with danger chemicals, leaving you wiped out for days, even weeks. Over time, the pain alarm goes off sooner, with less activity.





PRE-INJURY



CHRONIC PAIN

We want to gently “nudge” the pain alarm up so we can in order to doing more with out our alarm system overprotecting us.

You can approach pacing by looking at:

- Your activities across time (how one day compares to the next)
- The balance and schedule of activities within your day
- Specific activities you want or need to do

To maintain a calm state during activity:

Breathe comfortably (do not hold your breath)

Reduce and unnecessary muscle tension; Use slow flowing movements

Allow face muscles to soften, unclench jaw, relax your forehead, unclench your jar, relax your tongue and allow a soft smile to form

Maintain a calm mind

It may feel like at first you are doing less but in the end, you will end up doing more. This is not about doing less activity but it is about spreading your activity out. The result is that you can do more with less pain and create an opportunity to increase your fitness, health and involvement in things you enjoy over time. Creating regularity and stability in your activity level across time, leads to less overprotection in your nervous system and in turn creating a sense of safety in your nervous system.

Pay attention to your self-talk in the context of pacing.

Do any of the following statements sound familiar?

- *“I have to get everything done in the morning as I’m terrible in the afternoon”*
- *“I need to crack on today while I’m feeling okay as I always seem to have a bad day after a good day”*
- *“I knew that cleaning the kitchen was going to flare-up my back pain, but it was in such a state (mess) I just had to do it”*
- *“If I’ve started a job, I have to finish it”*

How helpful are these statement?

Tips for pacing:

- Do it more often for shorter periods of time,
- Do a little bit of it every day,
- Set a timer to stop the activity before you might regret it or pay for it later
- Adjust your body position during the activity... ex. Lift a foot up under the kitchen counter if doing dishes,
- Stand up and stretch between seated activity, follow ergonomic guidelines for lifting and bending etc.
- Plan your day or week ahead of time. Make sure you are creating balance within the day and across the week. Try to have an even amount of activity throughout your day and across the week.
- Alternate between tasks that have different physical, mental or social demands.
- Use coping statements like “ I may be sore, but I am safe”

How might you coach yourself to do things differently if you were implementing pacing strategies?
