

## INFORMATION

### Activity Management

People with persistent pain tend to base what they are able to do around the pain and this tends to lead to two types of activity pattern. Both of these activity patterns can be unhelpful when managing persistent pain.

#### Over Activity:

This means doing too much activity or too many tasks over a short space of time. This may happen if you are having a good day (or part of day), with less pain, or your mood is better. This can lead to increased pain either immediately or over the following days. These are known as Boom and Bust cycles.

#### Under Activity:

This means that you do too little activity to keep up your strength, stamina and flexibility in your muscles, ligaments, joints and bones, and to prevent pain. More of your time is spent resting, sitting or lying down. This is understandable, especially if there is a lot of pain. However, it may in itself add to your pain, as lack of fitness makes muscles and other tissues tight and weak. They then tire more easily when used or stretched, leading to more pain.

To look at which activity pattern you tend to use, tick each of the following statements that apply to you.

#### List A - When pain levels are low ...

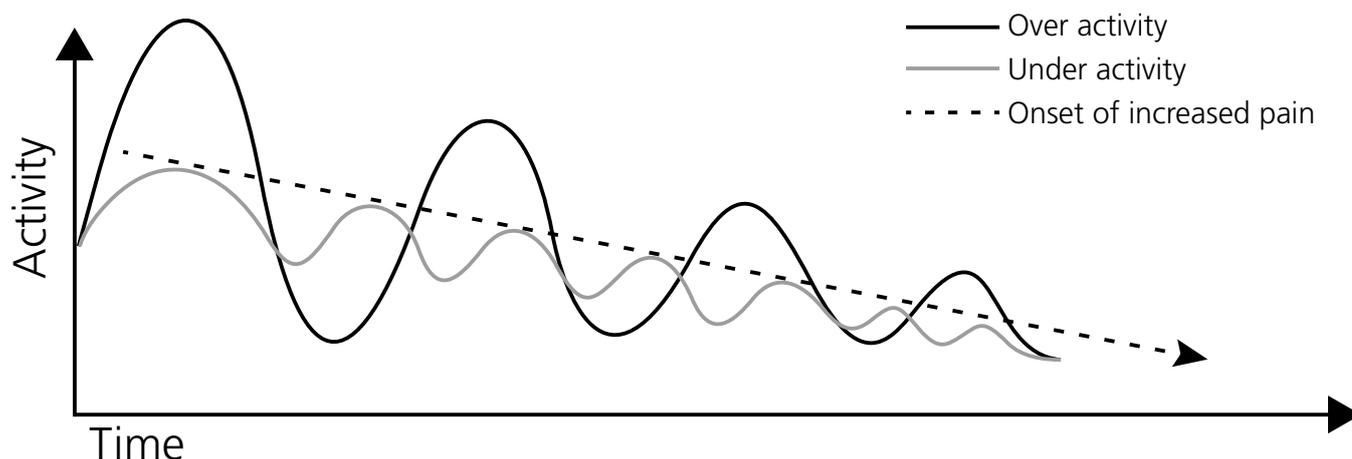
- I try to make up for all of the things that I haven't done or achieved because pain has stopped me.
- I try to fit in as much as possible until the pain makes me stop.
- I do activities as fast as possible until the pain level is too high.
- I keep going with all of my activities, despite the pain, with few or no breaks.
- I put on a brave face and keep "battling" with activities.

#### List B- When pain levels are high ...

- I do very little so as to keep the pain level low.
- I reduce all of my activity until pain gets lower.

If you have more ticks in List A then you have an overactive style way of managing pain, if you have more ticks in List B you have an underactive style. You may have ticks in both lists which indicates fluctuating between these two styles.

The diagram below illustrates these two patterns of activity management.



As the Explain Pain Hand-out shows, both patterns of behaviour result in increased pain. You achieve less and less over time, lose confidence, become tired more easily and lose physical fitness. You may also become more irritable or bad tempered, lose contact with family and work colleagues, lack energy and drive and lose motivation. Once you have identified what pattern of activity you have you can look at how you can break the unhelpful cycle.

Experiment with making small changes in your activity style. Are you fixated on doing things in a particular way or at one time? Look at whether the current way you get activities completed has more disadvantages or advantages. An activity diary may be helpful when looking at this.

## Breaking the Cycle:

If you are to live well with your condition then it is important to break out of this cycle to maintain a level of activity that will help your general health. It may be that you will have to accept some limitations- for example, you may never be able to manage long distance walks as you may have used to. However, you can still find your maximum level of activity given those limitations.

When having a flare-up you will generally find that you still have to spend some time resting, but try to keep this as brief as possible, returning to your normal activities when you can. Breaking the cycle means doing more than you would usually do on your bad day, and doing less than you usually would on a good day to "average out" your days a bit more and avoid the extremes of the Boom and Bust cycle.

## Why it can be difficult to change activity patterns:

There are many different reasons why it can be difficult to change the way we approach activity. Sometimes this is because we have unrealistic expectations of ourselves, based on what we used to be able to do or what we want to do. This can be accompanied by feelings of loss and sadness as we adapt to changes in our lifestyle. It may also be difficult for others to adapt their expectations, particularly when they are familiar with you taking on certain roles and responsibilities. It might be useful to talk through these issues together, so you are both realistic about what is possible and are best able to support each other.

## Focusing on What is Important to You:

The Boom and Bust cycle is often driven by us placing emphasis on passing feelings. The solution lies in not being so driven by how you feel- that is, your perceptions of pain, and the feelings and ideas you have about it- and acting from a broader perspective that includes your values for life.

## Successfully Managing Activity:

Successful activity management includes consideration of the three PA's (Personal Assistants).

### Plan:

Plan each day in advance and focus on activities that are realistic. Allow yourself time for occasions when you don't feel like it, for example if you are really tired or in more pain.

### Prioritise:

Decide on what is important to you, and make sure those activities are in your daily plan. Consider whether you could delegate any tasks or ask for help. Remember to prioritise time for yourself and for enjoyable, distracting activities that help you to cope with the pain.

### Pace:

Don't overdo activity on a good day and rest too much on a bad day. Plan appropriate breaks in long or tiring tasks so you don't overdo it. For example fold the washing in sections with a break in between rather than doing it all in one go.

### Adjust:

Adjust your expectations of what you *can* do based on what is realistic currently. Try not to base it on what you used to be able to do or wish you still could.

### Adapt:

Think about carrying out activities differently so you can still achieve and enjoy them but without paying for it as much.

### Allow/Accept

Work on what you are able to do. Try not to criticise yourself for what you cannot.

When thinking about planning you could use time as a guide looking at how long you could realistically carry out that activity every day, despite pain. You could also consider how often you do it and when in a typical day. Below is a table that might help you.

Activity	Time spent on a good day	Time spent on a bad day	Everyday plan	Number of times per day
E.g. Washing up	20 minutes	5 minutes	15	3

Here are some tips for successfully managing activity with persistent pain.

- Once you've made a plan stick to it. Don't say, "I'll just do 5 more minutes" or "I'll just finish this bit". This type of thinking leads to over activity.
- Try to do some activity on bad days, even if it is only 5 minutes. Be aware of unhelpful thinking or fearful predictions on difficult pain days. This type of thinking can reduce your activity further, so experiment and you may be surprised how much you can do on a bad day.
- Over time you can think about steadily increasing your activity and we will discuss this further in goal setting and problem solving.
- Record and reward your achievement.

There are situations where it is more challenging to use your PA's; for instance, having to cope with family demands, having to meet a deadline at work, or having a good or bad pain day. To tackle this situation, write down any barriers that you might face and next to it write down what you can do to tackle those barriers so that you can best manage that activity.

## Activity Management Summary

- Many people with chronic pain often feel like they must do everything on the days that they feel okay and end up pushing themselves past their limits and needing a long rest or recovery period. This means some days are really busy and others with little activity. This cycle is also known as Boom and Bust.
- A good example of a way to manage activity better is to balance these days a bit more, to do less on those good days, and more on the bad days. This is a form of pacing. This reduces the periodic "boom" and "bust" and helps daily management.
- Managing activity successfully is helped by the you PA's; Planning, Prioritising, Pacing, Adjusting, Adapting and Allowing/Accepting.
- On a bad day it might be harder to complete one of the planned activities and so you could try adding in further breaks if necessary.
- Prioritising can allow you to better manage your day by eliminating tasks that aren't necessary.
- It is important to be compassionate towards oneself as pain can often change the way you feel, what you are able to do and how you see yourself.

### Home Practice:

- Think about your current activity pattern, an activity diary can be helpful and note down any advantages or disadvantages.
- Think of four ways you could change your activity pattern to allow you to better manage activity without getting into an under-over (boom/bust) activity cycle.

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Name:

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<b>Monday</b> am	<b>Tuesday</b> am	<b>Wednesday</b> am	<b>Thursday</b> am	<b>Friday</b> am	<b>Saturday</b> am	<b>Sunday</b> am
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