

Physiotherapy Department

Pacing and setting of a baseline – how to increase your activity levels

Information for patients with back pain



The longer back pain continues, the harder it can become to keep active. What happens is that on good days, when your back pain is not too bad, you may overdo some activities. This can lead to increased pain, which means that you then tend to reduce your activity for the next day or so. Over time this can lead to you avoiding activity and you may begin to notice that you are becoming less and less active.

This cycle of events can be changed by a plan of action called pacing. The aim of pacing is to gradually increase your activity level (or reduce your over-activity).

The first stage is to work out your present activity level. This is called setting a baseline. Once you have worked out your baseline you will be able to start exercising at a level which is manageable, and to gradually improve.

How to set a baseline

- **Day 1:** Think about how much activity you feel you will be able to manage. Try out this amount. Record the number of minutes of activity you managed to do.
- **Day 2:** Think back on how Day 1 went. Adjust the amount if necessary. Try out this amount. Record how much activity you managed to do.
- **Day 3:** Think back on how day 2 went. Adjust the amount if necessary. See what you can do. Record how much you managed to do.
- Calculate the average amount which you achieved by adding together the scores from days 1 to 3 and then divide by 3.
- Work out 4/5ths (80%) of this score. This is your starting point – what we call your **baseline**.

Example: walking slowly on level ground

Day 1	6 min
Day 2	4 min
Day 3	5 min
Total	15 minutes
Average	5 min
80%	4 min
Baseline	4 min

You need to set a baseline for each of your individual stretch and fitness exercises. If you need help working out your baselines, please ask us. You will soon get the hang of it.

Pacing – the road to success

If you continue to exercise at your baseline level, you are unlikely to make progress. You need to gradually increase the amount of exercise you do. This is called pacing.

Pacing is a planned approach to increasing your level of activity. It should not make your pain worse. If you know your baseline then you can increase your level of activity in several ways by:

- Increasing the time
- Increasing the number of repetitions
- Increasing the hold
- Increasing the resistance
- Reducing the rest time between each exercise.

Choose one of the above which suits your activity and make a plan of:

- When you will start to increase your exercise
- How much you will increase it by each time
- How regularly you will make the increases
- When you will re-measure your baseline.

Remember to make a record of your achievements. This will help you plan the next step in your exercise programme.

Example: Walking

Pacing – 30 second increase every second day. Re-measure the baseline in 3 weeks.

Week 1

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Baseline	4 min	4 min	4 min	4 min	5 min	5 min	5 min
	4 min		30 sec	30 sec			30 sec

Week 2

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	5 min	6 min	6 min	6 min	6 min	7 min	7 min
	30 sec			30 sec	30 sec		

Week 3

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
	7 min	7 min	8 min	8 min	8 min	8 min	9 min
	30 sec	30 sec			30 sec	30 sec	

Important note:

Do not do more than your daily target for that day, even if you feel good. This is to reduce the risk of overdoing it or progressing too quickly. But you should do the activity even if you are not feeling up to it. In this way you will gradually increase the amount of activity you are able to do.

You should try to balance your day with periods of rest and periods of activity. Pacing will help you manage your day better and, by keeping to your target, means you will be more in control of how much you do. The aim is to maintain a balanced level of activity over the day and week.

Questions & how to contact us

If you have any questions, please contact us at:

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If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**. When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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