

PERSISTENT PAIN MANAGEMENT: PACING YOURSELF

PATIENT INFORMATION SHEET

What is “pacing”?

Pacing is spacing your activities throughout the day to avoid making your pain worse. Many people with chronic pain push or force themselves to get something accomplished in the short-term (the “big push”), and then end up with much worse pain and are unable to do much for several days. Pacing is the opposite of this. The purpose of pacing is to make it possible for you to be active every day. Pacing and the “big push” are compared below.

Pacing: Taking a break *before* you need it.

Benefits:

1. Pain stays manageable.
2. You should be able to maintain a certain level of activity day after day.
3. Every day you are able to accomplish something you want or need to do.

“Big Push”: Forcing yourself to keep going.

Results:

1. Pain increases significantly. Medication need may increase. Irritability may increase.
2. Recovery from excessive fatigue and an increase in pain may be slow and depressing.
3. You accomplish your short-term goal, but then experience a setback in your recovery.

How can I learn to pace myself?

By trial and error you can find out what you can do and for how long without your pain increasing or returning. For example, you may find that you can work at a certain activity for 30-minute periods, taking off 5 minutes every half-hour. Setting a timer helps you remember to rest. At the end of the day you may discover that you have worked productively for a total of 5 hours without increasing your pain.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patient & Visitors, then Patient Education

Adapted from: McCaffery M, Pasero C (1999). Pain: Clinical Manual, Mosby, p. 504. Rev. 7/04