Persistent Pain Management Series

Your guide to goal setting and pacing

Goal setting
It is important to set achievable goals to help manage your persistent pain and improve your quality of life. Most people in persistent pain have, understandably, reduced many pleasurable aspects of their life. Goal setting, assisted by health professionals, allows you to take control of the affect your pain has on your life.

Areas of life you may like to consider when setting goals

- **Personal relationships**
  How much time you spend with people who are important to you (family members and friends), or making positive changes in your relationships.

- **Education and learning**
  Learn new skills, gain new knowledge or simply trying new things.

- **Work**
  Set goals relating to your occupation or job, volunteer work or work around your home.

- **Recreation and fun**
  Ensure you have fun through hobbies, sport or leisure activities.

- **Spirituality**
  It may be as simple as enjoying the wonder of nature or formal participation in an organised religious group.

- **Community participation**
  Be more active in your community or do something positive for the environment.

- **Self care**
  Look after your health (e.g. improve your diet, physical activity and practicing relaxation).

### Areas of life that are important to me

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of life</th>
<th>Importance (0 = no importance, 10 = extremely important)</th>
<th>What small changes might I make to improve the quality of this area of my life?</th>
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<tbody>
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Setting goals—pacing
Sometimes you might choose a goal that is difficult for you to achieve right now. Pacing can help you achieve your goals by:

- managing your activity to avoid repeated flare-ups
- increasing your activity gradually and in a safe and planned way
- making everyday tasks easier by changing how often, how much and for how long you do them.

It does not have to be a physical activity, it could be something to do with your mental or social wellbeing, diet or fitness. Pacing works best when you practice it every day.

Who should try pacing?
If you are less active
You might have reduced your activity levels in an attempt to have less pain.

Ask yourself, ‘has resting for extended periods helped with my pain?’

In the long-term too much rest can cause harm such as:
- muscle wasting and joint stiffening
- reduced physical capacity
- reduced quality of life
- increased pain.

If you are over active
Do you push through the pain and pay for it later with increased pain, medication or slower recovery?

Do you feel you are in a constant state of flare-up? The increase in pain leads to avoiding some tasks which can impact on your quality of life.

How do I start pacing my physical activity?
1. Choose a realistic goal
Choose an activity you would like to improve. For example, your goal might be to walk for 15 minutes each day but at the moment you might find walking any longer than five minutes causes your pain to flare-up. You can use the baseline chart to record your goal.

It is also important to think about how your goal can benefit you. This will help keep you motivated.

2. Measure the maximum activity you can do over three days
Over three days, measure how long you can do an activity before your pain starts to increase. After three days, work out an average time for that activity. If you are in constant pain, measure how long you can do an activity before your pain changes.

For example, on Monday you walk for 9 minutes, Tuesday for 11 minutes and Wednesday for 10 minutes. Your average walking time is 30 (total minutes you spent walking) divided by 3 (number of days) which equals 10 minutes.
3. Set your pacing baseline
Once you complete step two, set your pacing baseline by reducing your average activity by 20 per cent.

For example, if your average activity for walking is 10 minutes, then your pacing baseline is eight minutes. This level of activity does not promote pain or a change in pain and this will be your starting point.

4. Work within your limits
To get an accurate pacing baseline, always use these steps to help lower the risk of flare-ups. This part requires discipline to avoid doing too much even though you feel okay.

5. Increase towards your goal
Over time, start to work up towards your goal. Each week increase your activity by 10 to 20 per cent of your baseline. Once you have reached your goal, continue at this level until you feel comfortable you can do it easily.

6. Review your goal
Once you are comfortable and achieving your goal, you may wish to restart this process with a new goal.

### Baseline Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Day 1 (minutes)</th>
<th>Day 2 (minutes)</th>
<th>Day 3 (minutes)</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Baseline (average less 20%)</th>
<th>Weekly (increment baseline plus 20%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>(9+11+10)/3 = 10 minutes</td>
<td>(10 - 20%) = 8 minutes</td>
<td>(8 + 20%) = +1 minute*</td>
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</table>

**Notes**

* The baseline is 8 minutes. Each week you would increase your walk by 1 minute.

**What if my pain is too much?**
At times, it might be too painful to complete an activity but remember, hurt does not always equal harm. If you are having a bad pain day you could:
- relax (see fact sheet *Your guide to distress and relaxation* for some techniques)
- slow down or break your activity into smaller sessions
- take a break and review what you have done
- change the activity
- try techniques to manage flare-ups (refer to fact sheet *Your guide to managing flare-ups*).