

Statewide Persistent Pain Management Network



Persistent Pain Education Series

Your Guide to Goal Setting and Pacing

There are many **benefits to setting goals**:

- Goals can provide individuals with a sense of purpose and direction
- Goals can give a person something to look forward to
- Goals can enable individuals to develop skills and build confidence in activities that are important to them

Therefore, goal setting can be a helpful tool for people with persistent pain to gradually regain control of their life.

“But my pain gets in the way!”

Some people with persistent pain feel they are no longer able to set long-term goals because of their daily pain limits so they may only set day-to-day goals. Or, some people with persistent have a long-term goal (such as returning to a specific activity they used to do before pain) but have no plan or stepping stones to help them reach their goal. The key to setting a successful goal it having both long-term and short-term goals that relate to each other.

Tips on goal setting:

- Using “**SMART**” goals can help you to define your long term goal. Ask yourself – is my goal **Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic and Time-stamped?**
- Break down your long term goal into a **graded plan** that consists of short-term goals
- **Reward** yourself regularly – this will help you to stay committed to your goal plan
- Understand that goals can be **flexible**
- Choose a long-term goal that you want to focus on and limit this to 1-2 goals at a time (you don’t want to boom and bust in goals)
- Use **supports** such as family members, friends and health professionals to assist you

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).



You might like to use the following table to help you identify potential areas for goal setting.

Areas of life that are important to me		
Areas of life	Importance (0 = no importance, 10 = extremely)	What small changes might I make to improve the quality of this area of my life?
Personal relationships		
Education and learning		
Work		
Recreation and fun		
Spirituality		
Community participation		
Self care		

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?'

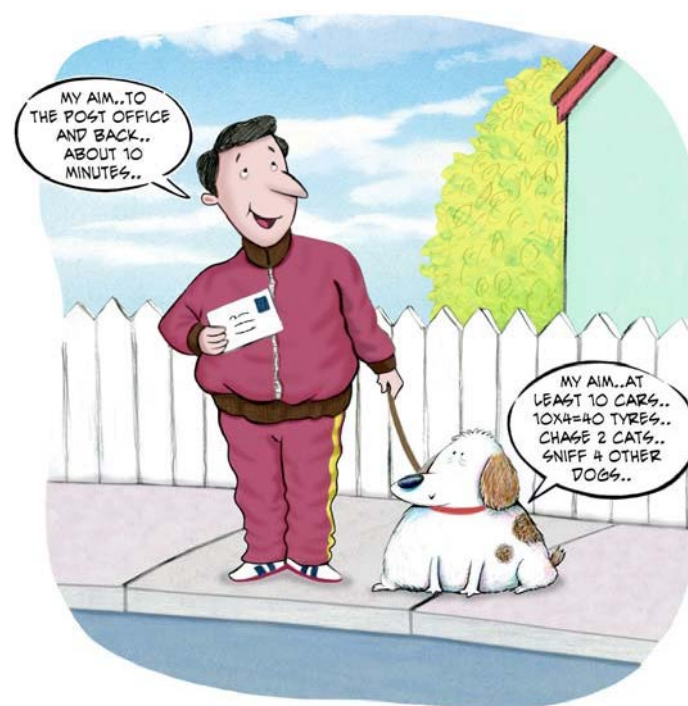
In the long-term, too much rest can cause harm such as:

- 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.



GOAL SETTING



How do I start pacing my activity?

1. Choose a realistic goal

Choose an activity you would like to improve and think about how your goal can benefit you.

For example, your goal might be to walk for 15 minutes each day as you would like to improve your mobility 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 (see below)**.

2. Measure the maximum activity you can do over three days

Over three days, be an experimenter and 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. Fantastic, now you know how to work out your **safe 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 feel comfortable and achieving your goal, you may wish to restart this process with a new goal. If you are having difficulties progressing with your goal, you may wish to modify/adjust the goal, seek additional support or assistance from your healthcare professionals and ask yourself – is this goal still purposeful? Sometimes goals don't work out despite the best of plans, so it's okay to choose another goal to focus on and come back to it at a later date. The most important thing is for you to experience success with goal setting.

Baseline Chart							
Goal	Activity	Day 1 (minutes)	Day 2 (minutes)	Day 3 (minutes)	Average	Baseline (average less 20%)	Weekly (increment baseline plus 20%)
Example Walk for 15 minutes per day	Walking	9	11	10	$(9+11+10) / 3 = 10$ minutes	$(10 - 20\%) = 8$ minutes	$(8 + 20\%) = +1$ minute*
Notes							

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



Other practical tips to help you pace

- Set a **timer** when doing an activity (e.g. use the alarm clock on your mobile phone).
- Alternatively, use **Apps** to set regular reminders to change positions/tasks/take short breaks throughout the day (e.g. the Mindfulness Bell App).
- Place visual **cues** around your home reminding you to pace (e.g. sticky notes).
- Use a **planner** to plan your daily and weekly activities, ensure activities are spread out and balanced.
- Frequent pauses or short breaks throughout the day is better than taking one single long break.

Remember, **learning to pace is a skill** so it is important to practice pacing as often as you can. You can apply it to most things in life e.g. pacing how you exercise, pacing the yard mowing, pacing your household activities, pacing your hobbies, pacing your driving and pacing how you spend time with others.

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:

- Practice relaxation or do something calming
- Slow down or break your activity into smaller sessions
- Take a break and review what you have done
- Change the activity
- Refer to factsheet - *Your guide to managing flare-ups* for further strategies

Additional resources

- Read** *Pain and Pacing Factsheet from ACI Pain Management Network*
https://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/212943/Pain_and_Pacing.pdf
- Watch** *Pain Tip 4: How to Pace our everyday activities (Youtube) uploaded by Pain Toolkit*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxpWyBtYals>
- Listen** *Pacing and Goal Setting by painHEALTH*
<https://painhealth.csse.uwa.edu.au/pain-module/pacing-and-goal-setting/>