

Occupational Therapy Department

Rheumatology: Managing Fatigue

Fatigue is a very common symptom of your condition. It can also result from:

- Inactivity (causes deconditioning and the body becomes less efficient)
- Poor nutrition (poor quality or not enough food and drink)
- Insufficient rest (not enough sleep or poor quality sleep)
- Stress and tension (intense stress can increase feelings of fatigue)
- Depression (fatigue is a major symptom of depression)
- Medication side effects (some medication can cause fatigue)

How can we deal with fatigue?

- Break goals into smaller steps
- Planning the day so as to mix rest with activity – known as ‘pacing’
- Resting
- Exercising
- Remaining socially active
- Learning to say **no** to others (is learning to say **yes** to yourself)
- Eating a well balanced diet
- Getting treatment for depression, if necessary
- Discuss your medication and its side effects with your doctor
- Stop before you get too tired

Pacing

Most people tend to do a lot when they feel good and not very much when they feel unwell. This leads to big swings in activity and you may find that



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you over do it one day and then have to spend several days recovering. This is known as the 'boom or bust' pattern.

Pacing means breaking tasks into small manageable chunks and stopping to relax in between before fatigue increases. Your fatigue level will still fluctuate but by trying to avoid over activity or excessive rest, it will stay within in a more stable range.

How to pace yourself:

- Make a plan
- Schedule regular rests and breaks in-between activities
- Break your tasks into sections
- Have a balance of activities such as work, leisure and relaxation throughout the day and the week. Don't load similar activities onto one part of the day or one day of the week, try to do small amounts often rather than everything at once
- Build up tolerance to activity gradually, space activities out
- Think about the consequences of doing or not doing particular activities and make a choice through prioritising or delegating
- Change position regularly while performing activities – vary your posture

Plan your week. For example, if you are going out for a meal, ensure you have included enough rest periods throughout the day, so you are able to cope with the evening. Imagine a battery: to have enough energy to keep running during one task, you may need to turn it off during another. Eventually pacing will become second nature and you will not have to plan so rigidly.

Checklist to help you with pacing

Prioritise - ask yourself the following questions:

- Does it all need to be done today?
- Can I get someone to help me?
- Does it need to be done at all?

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Plan – ask yourself the following questions

- Can I break the job down into different stages?
- What do I need to carry out this job?
- What basic activities does each stage involve e.g. walking, sitting and standing?

Balance – ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I balancing activity with rest?
- Am I aware of my energy levels and resting or being active accordingly?

Further Information

For more information, please contact the Occupational Therapy Unit on **024 7696 6016**.

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