

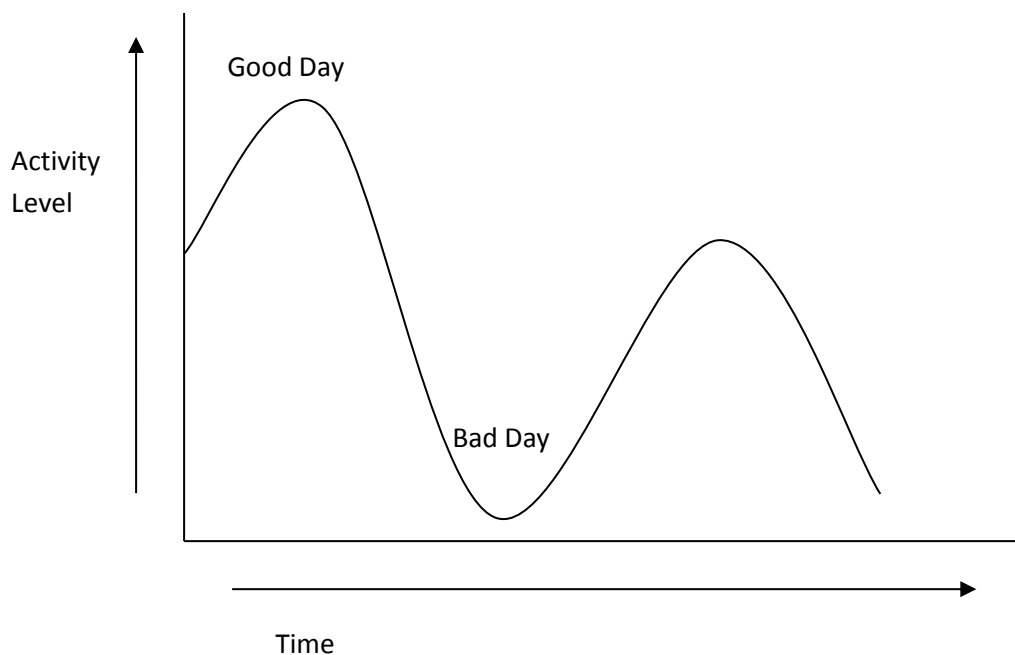
## Activity Patterns

As a result of persistent pain many people change the way they do things. As a result of the pain you may have given up work, do fewer physical activities or do less of those you can continue with. It may be that you avoid trying new activities or rest more during the day.

Many people with persistent pain find that they have a tendency to over-do things, perhaps pushing through the pain or under doing things by avoiding what may make their pain worse. There may be thoughts telling us to “*keep going you’ve got to get this done...or else*” or thoughts saying “*there’s no point going for a walk it will only make my pain worse*”.

Often people do more on good days when the pain feels better, and less on bad days. Unfortunately, this can mean that they overdo it on a good day ‘to make the most of it’ but then experience ‘pay back’ with increased pain later in the day or the next day resulting in the need to rest more. This is called **activity cycling** with levels of activity going up and down.

The problem with this is that overdoing it on a good day may stir up the pain. This increase in pain is due to the increased sensitivity of the nervous system as well as reduced tolerance of the tissues and decreased fitness levels that will naturally come about without a consistent approach to activity. Resting or being inactive for long periods on a bad day is likely to make you stiff and sore, giving the impression that the condition itself is worsening when this isn’t necessarily the case. In this situation, the pain is in control.



The consequences of activity cycling may be:

1. An increasing feeling of having no control over the pain. The pain is in control of what you do.
2. Becoming discouraged about doing anything and eventually giving up doing many activities.
3. Becoming anxious, stressed and/or depressed.

### **What can be done?**

The first step is to become more aware of your current activity patterns so you can assess how helpful they are in moving you towards your values and goals.

Mindfulness practice can help with this as it helps to give you clarity of mind and in being more aware of the sensations in your body during and after movement and prolonged positions you will be clearer on where your limits lie and make informed choices about what you do. In this situation you are in control of what you are doing rather than the pain.

Activity diaries can also be helpful to complete to raise awareness.

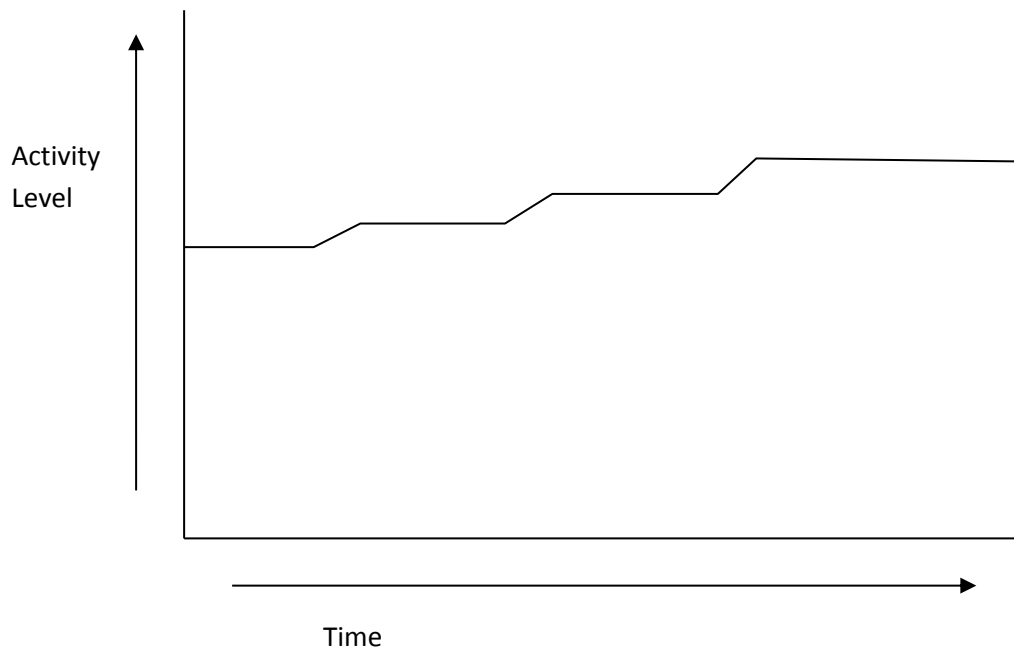
### **Pacing**

Pacing is about being able to do activities without increasing your pain to the extent that it subsequently limits your function, which means keeping to approximately the same amount of activity each day whether you are having a good day or a bad day. It's also about avoiding letting pain guide your activity levels, as often by the time pain has increased it's too late. By being mindful we can lessen any tendency to do too little or too much.

Pacing is about changing position and activity so that we don't spend too much time doing one thing. So being mindful of what we're doing and how long for can be useful. And then we are able to make a wise choice about what to do, which might be to swap activity from a sitting to a standing one, or perhaps sit and make a phone call, or even take a breathing space.

Pacing means not overdoing things on a good day. If we do, there is a danger that we will flare our pain up and be unable to function well the next day. When we pace our activities we avoid pushing our bodies beyond a certain personal limit. In time, as you become fitter you will be able to increase these limits and be able to do much more without necessarily increasing your pain. So being mindful with what we do means appreciating the importance of increasing activity gradually, neither being held back by fear nor pushing.

If you can successfully pace everyday activities, you will find that over time you will become fitter. This is because you keep going for longer and do not have to keep taking long periods of time out for rests. Because you are fitter you will be able to do even more without making your pain worse.



Finding the amount of activity that can be done consistently from one day to the next is the difficult part and can only be determined by you.

Being in one position for a period of time can be as much of a problem as doing too much of something active and therefore pacing also applies to limiting the time spent in certain positions.

The amount of activity or length of time in one position that can be done consistently without causing a flare-up in your day to day pain is called your **baseline or starting tolerance**.

### **Finding your baseline/ starting tolerance:**

This is the length of time you can do an activity or remain in a position without flaring your pain up to the extent that you cannot do that activity/ be in that position for the same amount of time the next day .

You can also use quality of movement as a guide particularly when doing exercises. As you become aware that the quality of a particular movement reduces the chances are that you have reached your limit for that movement in that moment in time.

It is helpful initially to **find your baseline for sitting, standing and walking** as this will help you to determine how long you can do certain activities, for example by knowing your standing baseline you can easily work out how long you can stand to do the washing up or prepare a meal.

### **What next...**

Once you have found your baseline for any activity you need to stick to this amount on a daily basis regardless of whether you are having a good or a bad day. **Using a**

**timer will help with this.** It may be that you can repeat this amount of time during the day depending on the activity.

As your body gets used to doing this amount of activity, you will be able to **gradually increase the time** but this needs to be done slowly. It is better to plan this in advance rather than wait and see how you feel as this can lead you back into activity cycling. Some people like to increase by a percentage e.g. 10% or using a set time e.g. 1 minute. Increases can be made every 3-7 days.

### **Activity Diaries**

It can be helpful to plan your daily or weekly activities using an activity diary. The aim is that you have an equal spread of activities across the day i.e. you don't do everything in the morning and then rest in the afternoon and across the week.

### **Things to consider:**

1. Pacing is a skill and requires practice.
2. It helps to prioritise the things you need to do
3. Take regular breaks
4. Break up tasks into smaller bits e.g. rather than cleaning the whole house in a day, do a different room each day of the week.
5. Changing your position regularly could mean you can continue with a task for longer e.g. altering between standing and sitting when preparing vegetables
6. Build in strategies that may help e.g. stretches or breathing space
7. Recording your progress will help you to see that things are improving.
8. Pacing needs to be considered as a long term strategy
9. Use pacing for any new activity

Realistically there will be times when you cannot stick to your plan e.g. at a family party or wedding. Prepare and plan for this – give yourself a couple of easy days before and after the event and expect to be tired the next day. Sometimes the enjoyment that you get out of these activities is enough to make up for the bad day that may follow. Afterwards you can return to your plan of steadily increasing your activity.