

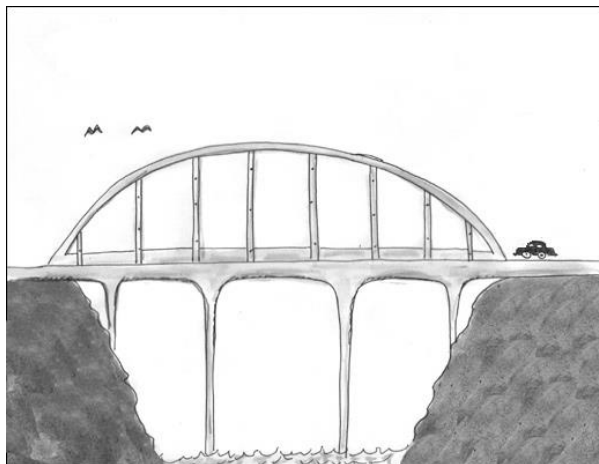
Rest and Relaxation

What is rest?

Rest is an essential part of pacing and management of energy and activity. We are resting when there is minimal brain and body activity; when we are “recharging”.

What is effective resting?

Effective resting is about the quality rather than the quantity of rest. Rest is about minimising sensory demands and having a break between tasks. Rest and activity are interlinked. Think about your day as a bridge of activity and rest as pillars supporting the bridge. Spread pillars of rest consistently along the bridge, to stop it collapsing under the weight of different demands.



How well supported is your bridge?

Effective Resting

- Rest is an essential part of recovery.
- It is important to get the right amount of rest for your needs. Too much causes lethargy and de-conditioning; too little can result in fatigue and an increase in symptoms.
- To get the maximum benefit from rest you need to create an environment with as little stimulation as possible. Cognitive activity such as watching TV can be fatiguing and will not be restful.
- Effective rest is a challenge! Many people with ME/CFS find it hard to switch off due to sensory overload BUT it is really important.
- Be aware of your thoughts. The ‘shoulds/oughts’ do not help you rest.
- Identify how rests can be regulated across your day. Prioritise them.
- It may be helpful to discuss rests with your family or employer so they can support you.
- Think about what you need in order to rest: a place, a time, a position, a willingness to practise, helpful techniques (e.g. relaxation/meditation)

Relaxation

Relaxation is an important tool in managing symptoms. Prior to becoming unwell you may have found reading, watching television or talking to friends on the 'phone a good way to unwind. However, anything that stimulates or over stimulates the brain in terms of physical or mental effort is termed activity. Relaxation should focus on resting the mind as well as the body.

There are many methods available to help you relax, and you need to find what helps you. Some ideas are:

- **Auditory:** For example listening to music or other sounds such as the sea
- **Olfactory:** Using pleasant smells to help you unwind. There are lots of aromatherapy products such as scented candles and oils you can use.
- **Visual:** Imagining you are in a restful place such as on a beach or in a forest can be helpful. Think about the sounds you hear, the feel of the sand or the sound of the sea. This can become a 'sanctuary' a place you can go when you need to.
- **Logical:** This might include progressive relaxation techniques, which focus on different parts of the body. Using repetitive phrases such as 'my legs feel warm and heavy'.
- **Meditation:** This might draw on some of the above but the emphasis would be on focus and acceptance, and of living within the present moment, an example of this is mindfulness or types of yoga.

Breathing and Relaxation

Effective breathing is an important part of most relaxation and meditation techniques. Shallow breathing can cause uneven breathing patterns and is often in response to tension.

Deep breathing using the diaphragm is beneficial to many people:

- Be comfortable wherever you are.
- Place one hand flat on your upper chest and one just below your rib cage.
- As you breathe in and out think about what hand is moving.
- To breathe with your diaphragm you should feel the lower hand moving.

Breathing helps to focus your mind and promote relaxation. Remember relaxation and breathing techniques are skills that need practice. It may be hard to keep focused initially, but over time the techniques will help you to gain more effective rest – the pillars of your bridge.

It is important not to go to sleep during a relaxation session. The skill is to be relaxed, but remain alert. The only exception is the use of relaxation to promote sleep at the end of the day or on waking during the night.

Some activities, although not classed as a relaxation technique, can provide a relaxing effect by nourishing us and increasing our energy and pleasure. An example of this could be having a bath.