

## Pacing and balancing your lifestyle

Pacing and energy conservation is one of the most important and effective methods that polio survivors practice to adapt to symptoms of post-polio syndrome to maintain independence. By developing creative ways to balance daily activities, exercise, rest and sleep, proper nutrition, recreation and social activities, polio survivors can achieve their personal goals and live a full life. It is essential for managing chronic pain associated with post polio syndrome symptoms.



Pacing, energy conservation and exercise are topics that should be thoroughly discussed with your healthcare provider.

### ***What is pacing?***

Pacing is a method of learning to recognize one's own body limits, working to achieve the most out of the day and being sensitive to one's own work load. This can be achieved by taking breaks, stopping when necessary, and working at a steady pace to reduce the chances of exhaustion and over activity of muscles.

Pacing is a necessary supplement for chronic pain management because it allows the muscles to relax and prolongs the amount of activities you can do throughout the day by spacing them to avoid aggravation, fatigue and causing strenuous pain. Scheduling activities incorporating the concept of pacing maximizes productivity during the day and minimizes pain.

### ***The pacing theory***

The theory of pacing teaches people to manage their energy wisely so that their energy levels will be maintained and gradually increase. Pacing also brings about a structure to the day, giving a person a better sense of control. The key is to find the correct balance of activities for every individual. The idea is to take needed breaks before pain becomes unbearable.

Often people will unconsciously frame their lifestyles to be balanced. For example, Doris, a polio survivor gets tired from climbing up a flight of stairs. Now, Doris aims to climb only half the stairs while taking a short break at the landing, then continuing up the rest of the stairs. She also makes an effort to schedule her day so that she only has to go up and down her stairs a maximum of twice a day.<sup>i</sup>

The main goals of pacing techniques are to:

- spread activities evenly over the day and week to avoid pain or fatigue
- increase the overall level of activity
- take regular short breaks before the pain becomes strong
- alternate activities - to help change the amount of energy needed

Without pacing, individuals may suffer from chronic pain and fatigue as polio survivors. This could lead to chronic long-term effects, including: Inactivity for fear of increasing pain, social withdrawal and gaining excess weight.

### Things to avoid

Under-activity:

- Lack of properly assessed and planned exercise
- Increased muscle pain due to a lack of proper therapy
- Decrease in muscle flexibility and overall stamina

Over-activity:

- Increased pain and fatigue due to un-balanced pace of activities
- Constantly pushing one's self over the healthy limits of their body
- Increased pain due to fatigue, exhaustion, and ongoing flare-ups



### ***How to Pace***

The London Pain Consultants (2007) developed a set of pacing techniques:

1. Measure activity
  - Take note of the exact amount of time spent on a particular activity
  - Note which activities cause an increase in pain
  - Calculate the average amount of time needed per activity
2. Set the limit
  - The limit is the amount of activity which should be followed in a regular and disciplined manner – it is 80% of time spent on particular activity
3. Stick to the Limit
  - Once the limit has been reached stop doing the activity even if you are in the middle of it and feel that you want to push yourself
4. Increase the limit
  - Listen to your body - Once a routine has been established and you feel that you can do a little more, gradually increase the limit
  - Increase slowly as your stamina increases

<sup>i</sup> London Pain Consultants, 2007; *British Polio.org.uk*, 2010