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Action on Pain is a national charity with strong European links providing support and advice for people affected by chronic pain. We are run entirely by volunteers affected by chronic pain along with healthcare professionals working in pain management.

We operate:

- * *Painline - our dedicated helpline open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. - Monday to Friday (answerphone sometimes)*
- * *Produce a range of informative booklets*
- * *A mobile information unit*
- * *Listen and speak up for people affected by pain*
- * *Work to ensure a greater awareness of the impact of chronic pain*

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Registered charity: 1088789

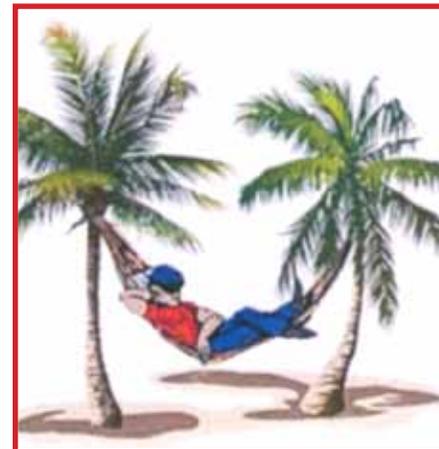
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AOP acknowledges the kind support of The Wellbeing Alliance, a not-for-profit health consultancy, delivering evidence based campaign's across all sectors with the funding of this booklet. www.thewellbeingalliance.com

DO YOU LIVE WITH CHRONIC PAIN?



SOME USEFUL TIPS ON HOW TO PACE AND RELAX



Action on
pain!

Registered Charity No. 1088789

- ✓ Increased sense of control - pace by stopping before the pain becomes unmanageable rather than having to stop because of unmanageable pain!
- ✓ Increased self esteem
- ✓ Less frustration



Relaxation also needs practise to get the most out of it

- ✓ Find time to practise each day when you will not be disturbed
- ✓ Practise in your most comfortable position
- ✓ Check your body regularly throughout the day to ensure you are not adopting tense positions and if you are, use relaxation to prevent the pain increasing.



- ✓ Relaxation need not be solitary; both Yoga and Tai Chi use relaxation but check if a class is suitable before you enrol.

Working at relaxation and pacing in different ways can have a positive effect on your family and friends, who may also like to join in!



Living with Chronic Pain? How to pace and relax Some useful tips

Pacing and relaxation are key aspects in managing chronic pain. Why? Here's why!

PACING

Do you remember those days before you were affected by chronic pain when you would be very active and sometimes saying that you had done too much?

Well it's probably the same now that you have chronic pain; you will experience days when you 'overdo it'; but now you experience more pain and have to rest for a time - possibly even for a few days before you can return to your usual activities.

This is called The Over Activity / Under Activity Cycle.

Does this sound familiar?

- Due to your pain you struggle to do anything so you rest.
- While you are resting your muscles get weaker and your stamina is low.
- You get frustrated about things you can't achieve so once the pain eases you tackle activities but often find you do too much in one go.
- The pain returns and you have to rest again.
- When the pain settles you try again, only to experience further episodes of pain which force you to rest. And so the cycle continues.



If you can relate to this cycle you may find now that the painful periods tend to occur more frequently, more easily and last longer. Due to the nature of chronic pain research has shown that the brain becomes more sensitive so that it tends to experience pain more easily and is affected by factors that you would not expect to cause pain.

Can you break this cycle?

Yes - by tackling small amounts of activity at a time - initially probably a lot less than you would expect to do. It's like returning to the gym after a year off - if you do too much on the first visit your body tells you so: chronic pain is just the same but will be affected more easily.



Take little steps at a time and be pleased with what you can achieve rather than what you don't achieve. **This is called pacing your activities.**

Some key pointers

- Work out how much of a particular activity you can manage without causing a flare-up of your pain. Always start at a lower level than you think you can achieve because it is very easy to over estimate your capabilities and fail before you begin.
- Stick to this level for a few days until you are confident that the level is right for you.
- Once you are confident that this level is correct and your pain has been easier to manage for a few days then slowly increase the activity a little at a time.
- Do not be tempted to increase it too quickly otherwise your pain may increase and you will be back to square one!



Consider looking at particular activities that you struggle with, such as gardening or ironing.

Or: Look at the activities that you tend to do in a week by dividing them up into easier or more difficult ones, starting at a level that you can cope with. At first you may feel that you achieve less in a week but as your strength, stamina and confidence return you should be able to increase them with less chance of increasing your pain.

What if the pain suddenly increases?

- Research has shown that even if you are pacing your activities you may experience a flare up of your pain.
- Don't stop everything but reduce your activities by half or a third depending upon the amount that your pain has increased.
- Use different techniques that you have found helpful in the past to ease your pain such as: heat, relaxation, gentle stretches, adopting different resting positions, TENS machine.

Once the pain has started to settle gradually increase your activities again.

RELAXATION

Relaxation has been shown to decrease anxiety, stress, muscle tension and pain levels whilst helping you manage your pain more effectively and sleep better.



It can prevent major flare-ups of pain plus reducing fear and muscle spasm whilst allowing you to tackle new goals. And there are no major side effects!

How does relaxation work?

- Mentally - Distracts your brain from the pain, making you less aware of it.
- Physically - Slows down your breathing and heart rate which causes your blood pressure to lower, decreasing muscle tension.



There are different methods of relaxation

◇ Progressive muscle tensing

Here muscles are alternately relaxed and contracted training you to recognise the difference between a tense muscle or relaxed muscle. This in turn helps you identify when your body is tense or relaxed. This is important as over used muscles have a higher tone as they contract more often without relaxing enough which leads to pain and fatigue.

◇ Deep breathing exercises

These encourage you to breathe slowly and deeply increasing the effectiveness of the oxygen supply to your body whilst promoting muscle relaxation.

◇ Relaxation imagery

When you create a pleasant scene in your mind that is not associated with your pain.

Which should I use?

Everyone is different so find out which style suits you best. Some people also find relaxation books and CDs helpful - these tend to concentrate on slow deep breathing and imagining pleasant scenes or events. You may find that different methods help in different situations.

Remember:

Pacing can require huge life style changes, sometimes involving changing habits of a lifetime. This will not occur over night requiring a lot of hard work and perseverance. But the rewards are enormous:

- ✓ Fewer episodes of severe pain
- ✓ A better quality of life

