



The Six Steps

of Proper Pacing

**When you
have EDS**

Pacing techniques, such as the “[spoon theory](#),” can be incredibly helpful for managing energy levels and preventing overexertion. This involves breaking activities into smaller chunks and taking breaks as needed to allow for rest and recovery. Sounds easy enough, right? UGH- NO!! You kinda need to plan to do this successfully to know which spoons you want to save for what matters most. For example, if you’re planning on running a few necessary errands or shopping, consider breaking it up into smaller chunks, such as going to the grocery one day and doing another errand the next day but not back to back. Or, if you’re planning on working on a project, take breaks (and set an alarm if you have to) every hour to remind yourself to stop and rest and recharge. Think of it like a marathon, not a sprint – if you spend too much energy at the beginning, you won’t last the whole 26.2 miles, and you won’t be able to finish. The same principle applies to everyday activities.

[These tips are only meant for people with chronic fatigue as part of their EDS; they do not apply to other conditions such as ME/CFS and could even be harmful to this community. Please always listen to your body and consult a doctor before starting with exercises of any kind.]

Step one: Figure out your baseline.

This simply means figuring out how long you can do a specific activity without experiencing a flare in symptoms. This step is about figuring out what you can manage without causing a real flare in your symptoms. Establish how many times or for what length of time you can do one specific activity before it causes a flare in symptoms, and keep a record of that as your baseline. Ideally, figure out your limits over the course of three days, trying out the activity three times so that you can get an average. Then reduce that number by 20% – that’s your baseline! For example, if you can walk for ten minutes on average without a flare of symptoms, you would then reduce that by 20%, which would be eight minutes.

Step two: Do that activity every day for a week.

For a full week, every day, you will continue that activity for the baseline of time – using our example, eight minutes of walking per day. It’s a good idea to keep a record of your baseline and any increases in activity with an app like MyFitnessPal or your smart watch or FitBit.

Step three: Increase the activity by a small amount.

The next week you will increase your baseline time for that activity by a small amount, for example, by roughly 10% – NO MORE, despite how good you may feel that day! Then engage in that increased amount of activity every day for another week or two or however long you need. In our example, you could now walk for an extra minute, bringing your walking to nine minutes per day.

Step four: Continue increasing your activity gradually.

Over the following weeks, you can continue increasing your activity gradually like this, building up your tolerance and training your brain and body away from pain, engaging your tight muscles into a flow of movement. You may find that increasing it gradually each day is more beneficial than continuing to do the same amount of the activity for a full week, but ensure that you are always using very gradual increments. Reassess your baseline every month or so.

If when you increase activity, you find that a flare is caused, then you can go back to the baseline or back a few steps and work your way back up again. Setbacks don't mean that the process isn't working; it just means you need to try again, so don't let that put you off. Think of the warrior climbing the mountain; how do they do it? One step-at-a-time.

Step five: Break activities down and add more.

It's important to break bigger activities down into smaller bite-size pieces in order to build your tolerance. As your body adjusts and tolerates activity without flares, you can add more to your day as you go. Gently!

Step six: Always take rests.

It's critical to plan rests into your activity schedule for the day. As the length of time you are engaging in one set activity extends, it's important to also actively plan breaks (sometimes extend the break too). For example, take a rest of five minutes to sit down every 20 minutes when you do housework to prevent flaring. Plan multiple rests during longer activities, before you start a new activity, and after you have finished with one.

The key part: The most important thing to remember is that even if you feel really good, you have no pain, and you feel like you could go on for much longer than your planned length of time, stop when the planned time is up or before you notice any pain symptoms. Even if you're having a good day, still take the rests that you have planned. Studies say although it may be counterintuitive for some people with chronic pain to stop for rest breaks when they are not in a pain flare, pacing allows them to avoid a flare and continue with usual activities. On the same note, if you are having a bad day and don't feel up to it, praise yourself for recognizing it, and don't be too hard on yourself. You can always try again the next day. If, on bad days, you need help to complete the task you have set for yourself, then don't be afraid to ask for help from a loved one. This balance is key to pacing.

Source: Pacing for Chronic Pain to Prevent the Boom/Bust Cycle. <https://www.pathways.health/pacing-for-chronic-pain-to-prevent-the-boom-bust-cycle/>