



How to Pace

Here are some examples of 'pacing' activity and exercise

Example 1: David

David is a 38 years old Electrician. He gets low back pain at the end of the day. This is when he needs to sit for at least an hour to do his invoices on his laptop. He is usually able to watch TV and read books without a pain flare, as he gets up at least every 30 minutes to move about.

Chores / work / hobbies

- **Baseline:** based on David's story, he estimates he would be able to sit for 30 minutes without a pain flare up
- **Small bits often:** time tasks; split them up. David changes his routine, spending 30 minutes at lunch time and then another 30 minutes when he gets home doing his invoices.
- **10% increase in time every week:** David can choose to increase his sitting time by 3 minutes (10% i.e. to 33 minutes in week 2) at lunchtime and evening every week

Daily walk

David decides that as his back pain is improving, he would like to work on his health and start a daily walk.

- **Baseline:** David thinks he would be able to walk 30 minutes, but as he hasn't done this for a while he walks 10 minutes on Day 1 without a pain flare. On Day 2, he walks 20 minutes, with an increase in pain for 2-3 hours, so this is too much. On Day 3, he walks 14 minutes with some increase in his pain for 20 minutes.



- He decides he will start at $(10 \text{ minutes} + 14 \text{ minutes})/2 = 24/2 = 12$ minutes.
- **10% increase in time every week:** David increase from 12 minutes twice a day in Week 1; to 13 minutes twice a day in Week 2; to 14 minutes twice a day in Week 3; and 15 minutes twice a day in Week 4. He has achieved the 30 minutes walk per day and decides to continue with 2 x 15 minute walks per day as this fits with his work.

Example 2: Fred

Example 2. Fred is a 48 years old farmer with low back pain. His pain increases after he walks more than 20 minutes. Fred has been advised to walk 30-40 minutes every day to improve his health. Let's look at pacing for Fred.

Daily Walk

- **Baseline:** Fred is happy he can start with a baseline of walking 15 minutes
- **Daily and small bits often:** Fred walks 15 minutes once a day
- **Increase 10% per week:** Fred increases his time by 10%. So he adds 1½ minutes per week. This means he does 16.5 minutes twice a day

Fred does his walk everyday and at 10 weeks, so he can now walk 25 minutes comfortably. He then does this 2 times a day as he wants to slowly reduce his weight.



Chores / work / hobbies

Fred's next goal is to re-plant his large vegetable patch without pain flares

- **Baseline:** Fred works out the area of ground that he can do without a pain flare
- **Daily and small bits often:** He loves his tomatoes the most, so he chooses the tomato patch first (2m x 2m)
- He will dig $\frac{1}{2}$ the patch on Sunday (1m x 2m) and the other half on Monday (1m x 2m)
- He plants half the plot (1m x 2m) on Tuesday and completes the rest on Wednesday (1m x 2m)
- On average, he spent 90 minutes per day and he did this in 3 lots of 30 minutes each
- He will review his work on Thursday, whilst he's watering the plants and make small changes
- **Increase 10% per week:** He plans a timed 10% increase every week (i.e. increasing to 3 lots of 33 minutes per day in week 2) to progress

Example 3: Beth

Beth is 62 years old. She has had pain in both shoulders since her mid 40's. She has three adult children and 4 grandchildren from her elder son. She looks after these grandchildren 2 afternoons per week. The grandchildren are aged from 5 years old to 14 years old.

She also works two afternoons a week in the local library.

Her doctor has asked her start a daily walk, whilst swinging her arms to increase the exercise load as she is concerned about Beth's slow weight gain.



Daily walk

- **Baseline:** Beth knows she is able to walk to her local park (4 mins ~ 400 paces). She can reach the first bench (2 mins ~200 paces). She sits for 30 minutes then returns home (she did this recently with the grandkids). While Beth hasn't thought about pacing, she knows she can manage this walk without a pain flare. She hasn't done any specific arm or shoulder exercises
- Beth can walk 6 minutes (4 plus 2 minutes), but she decides that she will start at 5 minutes (this also gives her 20% buffer or leeway).

Gentle swinging of arms

When you walk, you naturally swing your arms. Here we want Beth to increase the swing, but still in a relaxed way.

- **Small bits often:** Beth does 1 mins of increased arm swing at the start and end of her walk
- She increases this in week 2 by adding 30 minutes of arm swing when she gets to the mid-point of her walk
- This means Beth is moving the shoulders and mid back as well as getting the benefits of walking.

Example 4: Amy

Amy is studying at a university campus in the outer city. Amy is now 23 years old and is in the second last year of her 3 years course. Six months ago she started to have aches and pains in her arms and legs.

Amy is having trouble sitting to study due to pain, and also she finds her concentration and memory aren't as good as when she was at high school



She also works two afternoons a week in a coffee shop for 4 hours, then finds that she has trouble sitting at her computer for the next 1-2 days.

She drives to campus, and isn't doing any regular exercise. Sally, her friend, has suggested she start a daily walk. Sally has been reading about the health benefits of exercise on mood and pain.

Daily “jog”

Amy decides she would rather do a slow jog than walk.

- **Baseline:** Amy knows she is able to “jog” to her local park (4 mins ~ 400 paces). She reached the first bench (2 mins ~200 paces). She sat for 30 minutes and then went home
- 10% increase in time every week: She started to “jog” to the park, 2 minutes there, sit and relax – meditate for 30 minutes, then “jog” back

SMART goals

Amy has chosen to do the jog in the mornings because:

- Sustainable: she didn't have other commitments.
- Measurable: by iPod (time) and distance
- Achievable: no pain flares, fits with lectures
- Realistic: it is cooler to walk earlier in the day
- Timed and targeted – Scheduling exercise in the morning means it's more likely to happen. At the end of the day there are lots of reasons why it doesn't happen.



Chores / work / hobbies

She told Sally that she was having trouble keeping up with study, working and keeping the student house in order. The other students went out most of the time, and Amy seemed to be the only one doing the chores.

- **Small bits often:** she does her own washing in 3 small loads over the week
- **The 3 D's:** Do it, Dump it, Delegate it. Amy did a roster of the other chores. Her housemates were pleased that someone organised the schedule.

Like to try the pacing approach?

- Choose an activity that is important to you
- Use our 'pacing sheet' to help you work out your baselines for your chosen activity