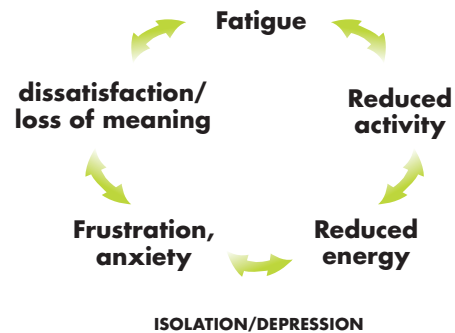
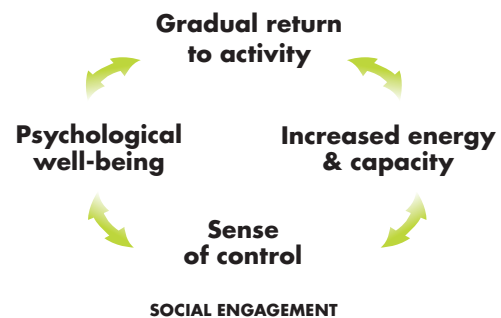


MANAGING YOUR ENERGY TO CONTROL YOUR PAIN



When you are depressed and inactive, you are likely to experience more pain. **Managing your energy and becoming progressively more active** are keys to controlling your pain and improving your quality of life.

Breaking the cycle of fatigue



Why am I always tired even though I'm doing hardly anything?

It is not uncommon for people who have been in pain for some time to cut down on their daily activities. But doing less makes them feel more tired, which further reduces their activity level during the day. It's an endless downward spiral: the less you do, the less you are able to do. Your muscle strength, endurance, concentration and memory all suffer when you are inactive. Your diminished capacity and the sense that you can no longer do what you used to do can lead to frustration and anxiety. You also lose interest in the things that previously gave you pleasure. Over time, you might experience the symptoms of depression. All these negative feelings make you feel even more isolated and tired. And there you are, caught in the vicious cycle of fatigue...

There are two ways to respond to the cycle of fatigue: you can let it drag you down, or you can stop the process by channelling your energy into a more positive cycle.

If you resume activity gradually and continue to manage your energy wisely, with time you will be able to do more. You will find that you have more control over your physical condition, and you'll feel better overall. You'll be able to do more tasks and enjoy more activities, (within your reasonable limits).

Apart from creating more energy, becoming active again gives meaning to your life, makes you feel better psychologically and improves your relationships with those you love.

How to manage your energy

Think of your energy as money in a bank account. You have to manage your debits and credits carefully, paying attention to your needs. After “spending” energy, you must plan for a “deposit,” i.e. some recharge time, in order to maintain the “balance” you need to get through your day. It’s important not to empty your energy account completely or become totally exhausted, because it will be more difficult to recover and will take longer to build up your balance. Nobody has unlimited energy. You have to know your limits and spend your energy wisely.

The basic principles of energy management

Set your priorities: Make a to-do list and set realistic objectives. Review your expectations in light of your new limits and reduced energy. (For example, accept the fact that the floor may not be spotless all the time and sweep the kitchen twice a week rather than every day.) To increase your chances of achieving your objectives, make sure they are precise, measurable, and achievable, within a clearly defined time frame. The following are two examples of the same goal. The first is measurable, doable and realistic; the second is vague and imprecise: 1) *Walk for 10 minutes on Tuesday in the park near our house,* 2) *Go for a walk this week.*

Simplify some activities: Ask yourself if there are easier ways to get things done, and eliminate any non-essential activities. For example, have the groceries delivered, or let the dishes dry in the drainer on the counter.

Use the right equipment to make tasks easier. Here are a few examples:

- A six-wheeled shopping cart to carry your packages
- A lightweight upright vacuum cleaner with a flexible handle
- A mop with disposable pads so you don’t need a bucket of water
- A long-handled brush for cleaning the bathtub

Reorganize your work space to eliminate unnecessary movements and make things more efficient. For example, don’t stack your frequently used pots and pans one on top of the other; rather, store them where you can get to each one easily.

Delegate or share tasks. Explain your current abilities and limitations, as well as your expectations and needs to your loved ones, and tell them how they can help. For example, you could ask your spouse to share the household chores, or suggest that the family cook meals together. Accept your limits and the fact that you can no longer “do it all” the way you did before.

Plan your activities in a datebook or calendar. Divide your activities evenly throughout the day and over the course of the week. Alternate between activities that require little energy and those that demand a lot. Leave time between demanding activities and plan for recovery time (mini-breaks and breaks). Remember to leave time for leisure and the unexpected! And always set aside enough time so that you can get things done at a pleasant pace that won’t leave you feeling rushed.

Mini-breaks during an activity

- Stretch a muscle group
- Change position
- Take a few deep breaths
- Stand up and walk around (e.g. drink a glass of water, go to the bathroom)

Breaks

- Take time out for relaxation: deep breathing, mental imaging, etc.
- Enjoy a hot bath
- Read a book or magazine
- Take a 15 to 20-minute nap

Review your schedule: Reassess what you planned to do in light of your current situation (energy level, pain intensity, the unexpected, etc.). Pay attention to the different ways fatigue can manifest itself, for example: difficulty concentrating, physical discomfort or irritability.

Be aware of your posture when you are moving, sitting, standing, or lying down. Always move and position yourself in a way that respects your physical limitations. For example, when carrying something, always:

- Divide the load (for example, put your groceries into two bags instead of one).
- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart.
- Keep your back straight and flex your knees when you bend.
- Carry things close to your body.
- Take breaks.
- Ask for help when lifting something heavy.

Learning to manage your energy takes some time and a little “trial and error” but you’ll be pleased when you see how improved energy management makes it easier for you to be active again and keep your pain under better control. You can get help with the process from different health-care professionals such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists, kinesiologists and others. Don’t be shy to ask for advice!