



Becoming More Active – Getting Started

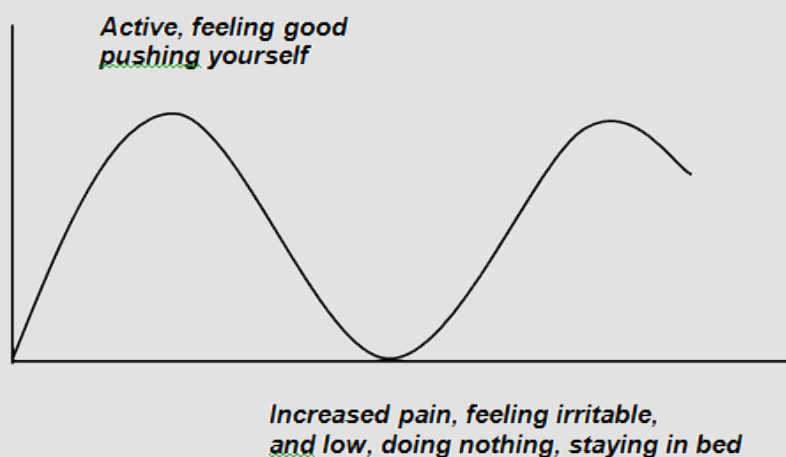
People often say that they want to do more things. They want to get fitter, lose weight or more independent. Yet despite having tried time and time again they end up worse, back to square one and feeling disheartened.

Do you recognize this pattern? On a day that you're feeling a little better in yourself - the pain does not seem to be too bad – you decide to clear out all the rubbish in the garage, or to walk to the shops rather than drive. You get up and start and maybe even finish the job, or make it to the shops. You feel good. The next day your pain increases, your mood plummets, you rest more than usual or even stay in bed. You find that you're on a short fuse, end up taking more tablets and having an argument with your partner or children.

This is very common. And it's disheartening. But this factsheet aims to help you change that! Read on to find out more. If you want more information, then go to the 'Get More Information' section of the KYOH Patient Online Platform, accessible on the right hand side of the Pain Service website. If you're not registered on the Patient Online Platform, then click on the 'Get more information/resources' section of the same website.

Activity Cycling

The pattern described above falls into what is known as ‘activity cycling’. Have a look at the graph below:



With activity levels going up and down like this, you never know from one day to the next how much or how little you are going to be able to do. This can make you feel down, frustrated or angry.

It may also make you reluctant to try that activity again. This is **avoidance**. **Avoidance** happens when you believe that doing certain activities will make you worse. Your brain also starts to associate that activity with pain and sends pain messages as soon as you start doing it.

Avoiding activities can affect your self-confidence and make life more negative. It also becomes harder to do things the longer you put them off. In order to break the activity cycle, we need to manage the amount of activity we do over a long period of time, to make sure that we don't end up disheartened.

Pacing and Tolerance

It's not helpful when pain dictates what you can or cannot do. Although it seems like a good idea to do more on a good day, you still lose out in the long run as it takes time to get over it. One way of getting out of this cycle is to try **pacing**. Pacing can help you to be in control of your activity.

Pacing means doing a steady amount of activity every day.

When you pace yourself, how much you do each day is decided by a plan and not by how you are feeling. By learning how to pace yourself you will work at a level that allows you to keep to the same steady rate, on bad as well as good days. This level will have built in rest times. It may take longer to finish a job in the short term but it will not result in a flare up of pain and stress.

Some people decide that an activity is just so important to them that they will do it as usual and accept the consequences. Other people will decide that it is time for a change. It may help to look at the short and long term pros and cons of doing it as you have always done it, against working on a new way. It is important that you decide for yourself what is going to help you do things in a way that fits in with your values and priorities.

In order to pace yourself you need to know what your **tolerance** is to different activities. **Tolerance** is the period of time that you can manage an activity or do something without pushing into Level 3 pain:

Level 1: Ok, as usual

Level 2: A little more, and worse

Level 3: Really pushing it, oh no!

Pacing and Tolerance continued...

Tolerance is individual to you and may well vary between activities. For each activity, you have to work out the period of time that allows you to remain active at the same level on good and bad days.

Most activities involve either sitting, standing or walking so it is useful to start by finding your tolerances for these. Later on you can work it out for other more specific activities that you want to do. This can be particularly useful when starting an exercise plan or setting goals (see sections on **Exercise and Ongoing Pain** and **Goal Setting**. You can find these in the 'Get more information/resources' section of the Pain Service website).

Baseline Tolerances

In order to know your tolerances and pace yourself accordingly, you have to work out what your **baseline tolerances** are. Follow the steps below to find out:

1. Get hold of a stopwatch, or something similar. You will need something that will count up and down in seconds and minutes. Try looking for one on your mobile phone first.
2. Over a week, on both good and bad days, time how long you can sit before starting to push into Level 3 pain. Do the same for standing and walking.
3. Take at least two readings a day for each of these and record them in a chart, or notebook.
4. At the end of the week you can calculate your **Baseline Tolerances**.

How to use your tolerance times

Once you have found your baseline tolerance times, you need to stick to them. Always sit, stand or walk using them. At the end of each tolerance time change your position.

Do not be disheartened if your tolerance times seem very short. As you become fitter, doing the activities will become easier and you can start to slowly increase your tolerance time. Gradually you will be able to spend longer in any one position before needing to change.

Once you have practiced this for sitting, standing and walking you can try using it for other activities such as gardening, housework or dancing! A lot of people find this confusing to start with. If you are seeing a specialist at the Pain Service ask them for help if you need it.

Example

Mr. Smith's tolerance times are 10 minutes for sitting, 5 minutes for standing and 7 minutes for walking. He wants to watch a film on TV lasting one and a half hours.

By pacing himself Mr. Smith can watch the film. He does this by using a mixture of sitting, standing, walking and perhaps lying down in order to change his position within his tolerance times.

Timers

It may be useful to use a timer to remind you when to change position. It is all too easy to forget to move until pain reminds you. Using a timer will make you consistent. By keeping to your **tolerance** times your body and brain will learn that activity does not have to mean increased pain. A timer will also help your family and friends remember that you are trying a different way to manage your activity. As you gradually increase your tolerance times and keep a record of it, you will be encouraged to see the **progress** that you are making.

Pacing in this way works for most activities. Of course, there are exceptions. If you want to get to family or friends many miles away by car and your sitting tolerance is short it may be that you inevitably exceed your tolerance. However, you can also do things to manage this. For example, stretch before you leave, use relaxation en route (but only if you're a passenger!) and take regular stops to stretch and walk. Remind yourself that **pain is not damage** and that you have chosen to do this today because it is really important to you. Also, think about how you can plan to manage tomorrow instead of it becoming a "duvet day".

Chris' Experience

"I have a new allotment that hadn't been worked this year and the weeds were out of control. I set my plan. I would come down for only an hour at a time. I would arrive and look at my progress so far. At first I made little progress. I set out some posts enclosing my target for the day. Kneeling on my pad I would dig away for ten minutes, get up, have a drink of water, feel good that I'd done a bit, walk and stretch a bit and then get back on my knees for another 10 minutes. After an hour I'd pack up and walk home.

I paced my work within my pain threshold and felt I had won a small battle each time. I now have a clean plot that is well dug over. My leeks are growing, my beans continue to be harvested, the gooseberry bush has been moved, the herbs have been put in better order and green house has been repaired. I've won my war!"