

Chronic fatigue and pain

Adapted from www.getselfhelp.co.uk

Chronic pain and chronic fatigue are real conditions, and like many real conditions they involve a complex combination of physical factors, many of which no one understands well, and psychological factors.

Psychological factors influence the amount of pain or fatigue experienced, but also very much influence the level of suffering it causes and how much it impacts on other areas of our lives.

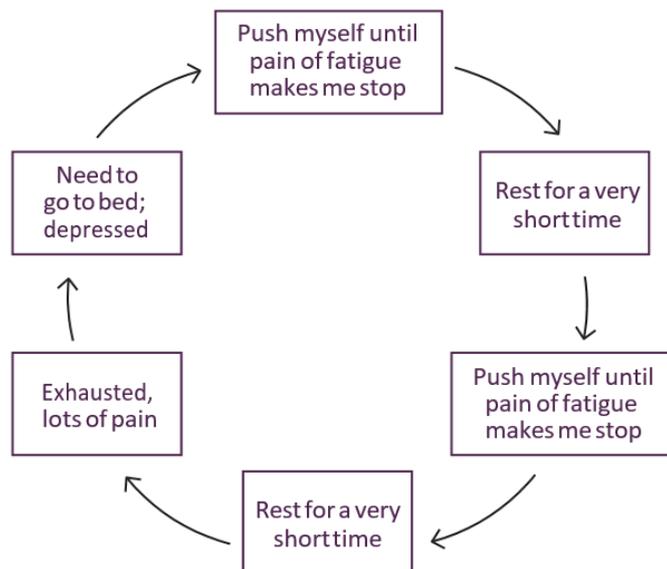
Helpful techniques for managing pain and fatigue

Doing things differently: Behaviours

Behaviours – how we do what we do – can often have a big influence on pain and fatigue. Often even small changes in our behaviours can make a useful difference to the experience of pain and fatigue.

Stop the boom and bust cycling

Often a vicious cycle – like this pain/fatigue cycle – gets set up. It causes much more pain/fatigue, and makes it harder to do what we want to do. Breaking this vicious cycle means stopping before the pain or (physical and mental) fatigue makes you stop – and scheduling in some rest periods. This is achieved by using pacing.



Do the amount that you can do without a significant increase in pain/fatigue, then stop. For example, mow a quarter of the lawn, rest for a while, then do the next quarter, rather than doing the whole lawn and ending up with great pain/exhaustion.

Don't worry if it seems a small amount you can do in one go. Pacing in this way will often allow you to build up the amount you do over time.

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Some other behavioural strategies

- **Complete an activity diary:** Notice if there are patterns. Are there activities that contribute to good and bad days? Are there activities that result in feeling less pain or fatigue, or more?
- **Pace yourself:** Schedule in rest periods and activity periods. Too much rest will actually make your pain/fatigue worse and harder to bear.
- **Physical exercise:** Check out with your GP or other health professional how you can gradually increase physical exercise. Develop a plan that starts from a level that is comfortable (don't boom and bust this!) and schedule regular (and frequent) sessions where you do the planned amount, building it up slowly over time.
- **Prioritise:** Prioritise the activities that can make the most difference for you. Make sure that some activities you enjoy are amongst the prioritised activities. Make lists of what you need to do, and cross things off when you have done them.
- **Schedule in rest and relaxation, fun and enjoyment, achievement:** Hobbies, music, pampering, socialising, eating healthily, good sleep.
- **Reduce distracting noise:** For example, turn TV off before reading.
- Do one thing at a time.
- **Reward yourself:** When you're doing well, remembering to pace yourself by doing more of what helps or doing less of what doesn't – give yourself a treat or pat on the back.
- Problem solving: use problem solving strategies when facing a difficult problem.

Thinking strategies

STOPP! Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Pull back, Practice what works.

There may be ways your current thinking patterns are unhelpful for letting you live the kind of life you want to live, despite the pain/fatigue.

When you find yourself angry or upset when thinking about your pain/fatigue, you might like to ask yourself questions like:

- What's going through my mind now? What meaning am I giving this?
- What am I reacting to? What have I been thinking about here?
- Am I thinking negatively about the future? Am I comparing my current situation to how things used to be?
- What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- Is there another way of looking at this?
- What would be the consequences of doing what I normally do?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (For me, for the situation, for the other person)



Being aware of these thinking patterns is a useful start to taking away their power to do us harm. If you think these patterns might be adding to your pain/fatigue, talk to your health professional about getting help with changing them.

Keeping going

These strategies can help with your pain and fatigue, but it often takes a while for them to make a difference. Keeping on using them is important even if it doesn't seem to change anything straight away. It may take weeks of continuing to practice them regularly before you notice much change.