PACING AND SETTING GOALS
ARTHRITIS ACTION FACTSHEETS

Pacing is a vital skill that can help you manage your symptoms. If you find that you do more than usual on a good day, or if you find it hard to say "no" when asked for help, you may benefit from improving your pacing skills.

Most people with arthritis find that they have good and bad days. On days that symptoms are less noticeable, they may try to get lots of things done to make up for days they are not feeling well and are less active. This can mean overdoing it on the good days, but can lead to more pain and fatigue afterwards, often resulting in having to spend hours or even days doing very little, in order to recover. Clinicians call this "Boom and Bust" activity. Resting in the "Bust" phase can improve pain temporarily, but the pain may return if you overdo again. Additionally, too much rest can cause the muscles to weaken and the joints to stiffen, so the amount of activity that you can perform before your symptoms return may also decrease. One of the most important ways of avoiding boom and bust is to pace ourselves better - especially on a good day.

Pacing means setting small but achievable goals and dividing the task into small chunks. This could mean vacuuming one room at a time, or doing a small amount of ironing, then resting and changing to a new job. It is vital that you don't do too much and that you set achievable goals. Try to plan your activities realistically and allow enough time for tasks as this will give you more control and reduce your stress levels. By being more aware of the activities that worsen symptoms and building up activities very slowly, many people are able to reverse this process, increase their muscle strength, joint mobility and improve their pain. Building up slowly will also increase your energy level, combat fatigue and enable you to do a bit more when you are not feeling so well. You will have to start slowly and be patient with yourself as it is normal to have the odd setback.
Being kind to yourself, keeping your goals realistic and not giving up is the key to success.

Arthritis
ACTION

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Planning is the key

Below are some examples of how you might chose to pace your current activities. Try them all and use the ones that work for you:

> Make a list of what you would like to do in a day. Be realistic, perhaps imagine reading someone else's list and deciding if your tasks seem reasonable or not. Setting yourself easy goals is vital because if you aim for goals that are too hard, you may not succeed and this may be demoralising.

> If you find it difficult to make a daily plan, just make a plan for the next hour or so.

> Decide which jobs are most important and put off anything which is not essential or which is too big a task for one day. Temporarily say "no" to any requests for help from others that are not essential.

> Divide up your jobs into small chunks, (e.g. a small amount of gardening, vacuuming one room of a house). Include rest periods in your timetable between tasks.

> Make sure that your daily plan includes some exercise - it is vital for keeping joints flexible, improving muscle strength and function, and reducing pain and fatigue. Pick something you enjoy so you keep it up. Start very slowly if you have not exercised for some time. Remember that getting ready for exercise, including getting changed, also takes energy so include this as part of your exercise goal.

> Don't be afraid to ask for help if you are having a less good day.

> Make a plan for what you will do on a less good day, which might include cutting back on some of your activities, or having additional pain relief. Make sure that you still do some exercise, as it is vital to keep the muscles strong. *See our factsheet on* **Flare-up Planning**

Stick to your plan, especially if you are feeling well. One of the most difficult but important things to practice is to resist doing more than you have planned if you are still feeling well. The aim with pacing is to be aware to stop your activities before you have to.