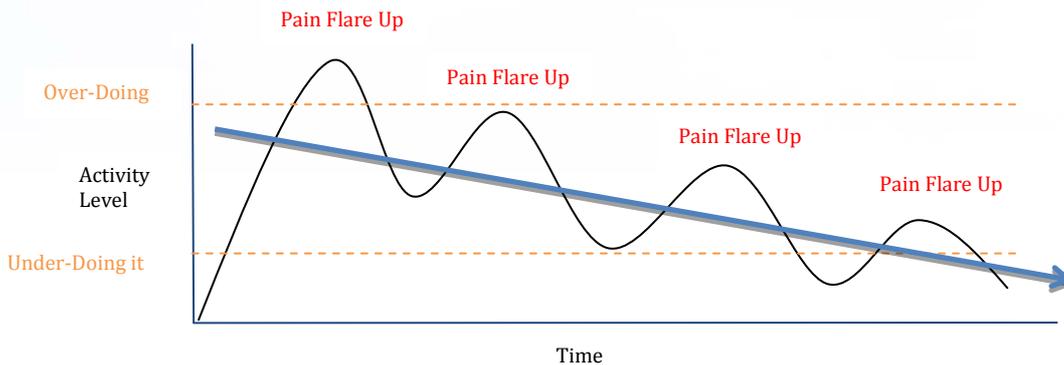


Chronic pain can have an impact upon how you go about your daily activities. For some people, this means reducing their level of activity because it hurts or in case the pain gets worse; for other people their activity levels on a given day depends on how good or bad the pain is; while others will fight the pain and may overdo activities (“over-doing”) eventually causing a flare up and having to cut back on everything (“under-doing”). Do any of these patterns seem familiar to you? These patterns of activity can set up an unhelpful cycle of over-doing and under doing activities it can feel like you are on a roller coaster sometimes!



While people get into the over- doing / under-doing rollercoaster thinking it means they are getting the most done despite their pain, in fact over time it can reduce your overall activity. Within a short space of time reduced activity can cause muscles to weaken, joints to stiffen and overall fitness to decline. Being inactive often means that it takes less to stir up pain in the first place, and pain can actually increase.

One solution to the over-doing / under-doing rollercoaster is a technique called: **activity pacing** – often just referred to as “**pacing**”. Pacing is about planning activity, breaking up an activity into smaller pieces, doing a little bit often and gradually building up over time. It means planning for an achievable amount of physical activity, working at a smooth and safe level and then gradually building upon it. It is about learning not to base activity on how much pain you are experiencing at a point in time, but working at a smooth and safe level based on what you have trained your body to manage.

You may also need to take into account some other aspects of your SCI when pacing your activities such as how tired you get or your need to pressure-relieve depending on your skin’s tolerance for certain positions – keep these things in mind when you are planning to pace.

Planning to pace:

1. Know what type of SCI pain you have & work with your health care professional to establish what activities are best for your particular type of pain.
2. Think about the things you enjoy doing but have cut back or stopped due to pain and brainstorm ways to gradually introduce them back into your daily routine.
3. Plan to start small and build up gradually towards your goals – small increases in your activity, week by week will give you long term results!
4. Set a very specific routine and stick to it – this will help you achieve your goals!

1. To start, you need to set a level of activity that you can do on a good pain day **or** a bad pain day and to do this you first need to establish your **baseline**. Choose an activity that is currently limited by your pain and monitor this over **three days at different times of day**. The activity can be anything you do regularly, and it should be something important to you that relates to your goal. When you have chosen your activity measure how much you can do before your pain increases. You can measure things like:
 - 🌀 repetitions of movement *or*
 - 🌀 distance *or*
 - 🌀 time
2. Now you need to set your **pacing activity level** – this involves taking the **average** of your 3 days baseline activity and **reducing the figure by 20%**. This becomes the target activity level that you aim for – **not more and not less** – an activity level you will achieve on each set day, despite the pain.
 - 🌀 Average of your baseline activity
 - 🌀 Reduce this average activity by 20%
 - 🌀 This new figure is your new **pacing target** for this activity
3. Develop a daily activity program using this **pacing target activity level**.
 - 🌀 Develop an Activity Pacing Plan
 - 🌀 Plan your activities around this target activity level
 - 🌀 Stick to the plan - work to a quota and not to pain
4. Develop an **activity upgrade plan**. This upgrade plan should be gradual and it should be directed towards your overall goal. Upgrade your activities **slowly** over a **minimum period of a week** each time to achieve success.
 - 🌀 Develop: a **gradual** activity upgrade plan
 - 🌀 Consider: repetitions, distance &/or time

Record your progress in a pacing chart or pain diary and discuss it with those involved in your health care.

When I pace my activities and plan rest breaks & stretches & changes in my position during the day – I actually get **more** done in a day! It takes some planning and some getting used to – but it is worth it. It helps me to get more done, I am less tired, and I'm in less pain at the end of the day!

Wayne, incomplete paraplegia

TOP TIP! For more information visit:

- 🌀 <http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain/spinal-cord-injury-pain/spinal-cord-injury-pain-physical-activity-and-exercise>
- 🌀 <http://www.aci.health.nsw.gov.au/chronic-pain/spinal-cord-injury-pain/spinal-cord-injury-pain-thoughts-and-feelings>
- 🌀 Read Chapter 9 of *The Spinal Cord Injury Pain Book* by Siddall, McCabe & Murray (2014 HammondCare Media)
- 🌀 Read Chapter 7 of *Manage Your Pain* by Nicholas, Molloy, Tonkin & Beeston (2000 ABC Books)

Activity Goal:

To be able to push my wheelchair to the park and back with my kids by summer
(where summer is in 3 months' time & distance to the park is 200m each way)

1. Set Baseline:

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Distance:	120m	100m	80m
Time of Day:	2pm	10am	6pm

Baseline Average: $(120 + 100 + 80) / 3 = 100\text{m}$

20% of Baseline: $20\% \times 100\text{m} = 20\text{m}$

2. Set TARGET Pacing Activity Level:

Target Activity Level = Baseline Average minus 20% of Baseline
 $= 100 - 20$
= 80m

3. Set ACTIVITY PACING PLAN:

Start with the target amount and aim to increase gradually.

Week 1:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM	80m	80m		80m	88m
PM			80m		

4. Set weekly upgrade:

Week 2: think about increasing by 10% over the course of a week.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM	88m	88m		95m	95m
PM			95m		

Week 3: Adjust your increase rate depending on progress, also increasing extra practices if that would be helpful – for example schedule twice daily practice

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM	95m	95m	105m	105m	115m
PM	95m		105m		

Week 4: Keep increasing as you work towards your goals, adjusting the pace of increase as you go. Try to be patient, and accept that some upgrades will be more gradual than others.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM	115m		130m	130m	145m
PM	115m	130m		130m	

On the next page, choose an activity goal and set up a pacing plan yourself.

Activity Goal:

1. Set Baseline:

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Distance <i>or</i> Repetitions <i>or</i> Time:			
Time of Day:			

Baseline Average:

Baseline Average: $(\text{Day 1} + \text{Day 2} + \text{Day 3}) / 3 =$

20% of Baseline Average: $0.2 \times \text{Baseline Average} =$

2. Set TARGET Pacing Activity Level:

Target Activity Level = Baseline minus 20% of Baseline =

3. Set a Pacing Activity Program:

Week 1: *Start with target amount and aim to increase gradually*

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri

4. Aim to upgrade gradually week by week:

Week 2: *Think about increasing by 10% over the course of a week.*

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri

Week 3: *Add 10% and also consider increasing **frequency**– depending on your progress.*

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM					
PM					

Week 4: *Add 10% and option of increasing **frequency**.*

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
AM					
PM					

Review your goals and discuss challenges and successes with your team