

Pain Strategies ME/CFS/FM

Pacing

from <http://www.cfselfhelp.org/library/strategies-pain>

A frequent cause of pain is overdoing or having an activity level that is beyond a person's limits. Pacing offers a way to bring stability and control by keeping the activity level within the limits imposed by the illness. Pacing can involve a variety of strategies, including: reducing overall activity level, delegating, alternating activity and rest, having short activity periods, switching between high and low intensity tasks, using the best hours of day for the most demanding activities, staying within limits for mental and social activity, and keeping records to see links between activity and symptoms.

Pacing is the heart of lifestyle adjustment to ME/CFS and FM, and helps control all of the main symptoms. How is your Pacing going? It's a hard one to master, be kind to yourself.

Restorative Movement

Restorative Movement is one of the most-commonly prescribed treatments for FM and can be helpful for ME/CFS as well. A RM program done regularly can help reduce stiffness, counteract deconditioning and improve outlook. Have you found your favourite RM yet?

Posture & Movement

People with fibromyalgia can help reduce their pain by experimenting with how they hold their body and how they move. Many find that staying in one position for an extended period of time, sometimes as little as 20 to 30 minutes, increases stiffness and intensifies pain. Have you experienced this? Moving periodically can help, as can limiting the length of time spent doing repetitive motions like chopping vegetables. Some people are helped by Tai Chi, Qigong, Breathing techniques, etc. Being attentive to posture can help as well.

Relaxation

The experience of pain is intensified by stress and by emotions like worry, frustration and depression. Emotions create muscle tension, which is directly painful. Emotions also contribute to the experience of pain indirectly by increasing stress and a sense of helplessness. Relaxation is an antidote to both tension and stress. Also, it offers a distraction from pain. For some people, relaxation involves the regular use of a formal relaxation or meditation procedure, such the Relaxation Response, the Body Scan, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and the use of imagery. What are other ways you relax?

Treating Fatigue & Poor Sleep

Pain, fatigue and poor sleep are tightly connected. Fatigue deepens the experience of pain. When we feel tired, we experience pain more intensely, so if we reduce fatigue, we lessen pain. Similarly, poor sleep intensifies pain, so improving sleep can help control pain. Of the three symptoms, poor sleep is often addressed first among people with ME/CFS and FM. Please don't feel you have to solve sleep today. It can take a long time to re-educate your brain and body on how to sleep. How do you eat an elephant?

Heat, Cold & Massage

Heat is best utilized for reducing the pain that results from muscle tension and inactivity. The warmth increases blood flow and thereby produces some relaxation, reducing pain and stiffness. For localized pain, heating pads or hot packs are used frequently. For overall relief, people often use warm baths, soaks in a hot tub or lying on an electric mattress pad. Cold

treatments decrease inflammation by reducing blood flow to an area. They also may numb the areas that are sending pain signals. You might use gel packs, ice packs or bags of frozen vegetables. With both heat and cold, you should not use the treatment for more than 15 or 20 minutes at a time. Massage of painful areas can also provide temporary relief from pain. Like heat, massage increases blood flow and can also relieve spasms. You can consider three different forms of massage: self-massage using your hands, massage using a handheld device, and professional massage. If you use a massage therapist, ask her to be cautious and to check frequently on your pain sensitivity.

Problem Solving

You can gain some control over pain by identifying the situations that trigger or intensify pain and then taking steps to change them.

If you have a job and find that your pain increases when you work under deadlines, problem solving could take several forms. You might train yourself to take time to relax your muscles. Looking at your situation more broadly, you may identify work overload as a recurring problem and consider reducing your hours, changing your responsibilities or taking time off from work. How have you addressed your triggers?

Distraction

Immersing yourself in pleasant thoughts and activities can lessen pain by providing distraction. Imagery can be especially helpful, as you visualize a pleasant scene, involving as many senses as possible. Engaging in activities that bring pleasure can also provide distraction from pain. What distraction do you use?

Healthy Self-Talk

Thoughts can have a dramatic effect on our moods and, in turn, on our perceptions of pain. Negative thoughts can start a vicious cycle. An increase in symptoms may trigger negative thoughts like "I'll never get better" or "It's hopeless." Such thoughts can then make us feel anxious, sad, angry and helpless, intensifying pain and triggering another round of negative thoughts and more muscle tension. This cycle can be reversed. It's possible to learn to recognize and to change habitual thoughts to make them more positive and more realistic. Research: positive self-talk, cognitive rewiring, reframing thought. Recognising things that you are grateful for can be very helpful. Also be aware of the parts of your body that are not in pain, you may be surprised how ok you feel.

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