

Pacing yourself

People with functional symptoms often have fatigue, weakness or pain which can be made worse by exercise. The common phrase “No pain, no gain” doesn’t always apply now. To overcome this your team will help you gradually increase the amount of activity you do. If you have had these symptoms for a long time, it may take some time to recover.

What often goes wrong is that increasing activity without guidance may lead to increasing symptoms. Understandably, this can make you believe that you must be making your condition worse or causing damage to your muscles.

When this happens, it is important to remember that you’re not causing damage if you do it under the guidance of your therapy team. Yes, activity can make the symptoms worse; but no – you’re not causing any damage. Understanding and interpreting this when you have pain and fatigue can be difficult, so it is important to discuss with your team.

Getting better may mean dealing with symptoms that may change from day to day, morning to evening. A very common problem in rehabilitation is a tendency to do too much on a good day and then feel much worse later that day or the next day.

You will probably experience good and bad days. The bad days may even feel as though you are ‘back to square one’. However, remember all the progress you have made so far.

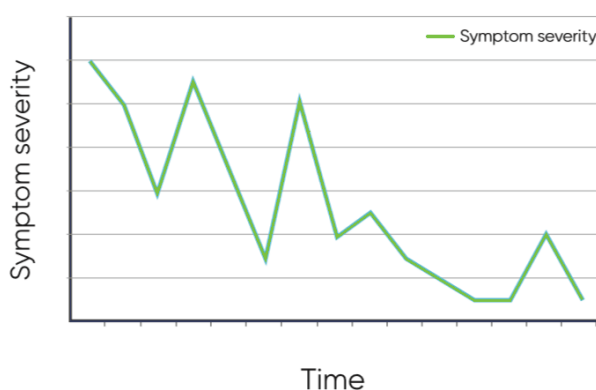
It is predicted that you will experience ‘flare ups’ as you try to improve with your therapy team. The aim is for each flare up to be not quite as bad as the last one with slow gradual improvement in between.

When your symptoms get worse again, it is understandably demoralising, but it is common as people try to recover from a debilitating illness.

The graph shows what happens when you are slowly improving overall with rehabilitation.

Some days you may experience worse symptoms than the day before, but over time your symptoms will get better, and you may experience them less often.

Figure two. Improvement of symptoms over time



Taking the next step and pacing yourself

It is important not to overdo or underdo it and to understand how pacing works for you.

The more activity you do over time, the fewer symptoms you will get over this time. This may be weeks, but if you have the symptoms for months or years, this may be much longer due to negative ‘re-wiring’ of the nervous system over time. This is known as **neuroplasticity**. The remarkable ability of the nervous system to alter its structure and function in response to internal and external factors is what your therapy provided by your multi-disciplinary team is based on.

[Adapted from What is Functional Weakness at www.neurosymbols.org – Dr Jon Stone, Consultant Neurologist]



MY TURN – Pacing myself

In the table below write the activities you expect to be doing today and what limits you could apply to these activities, to prevent doing too little or too much (see the examples provided).

Activity/Exercise	How will I PACE myself?
Example: complete housework today	Example: complete in ½ hour blocks with 15-minute breaks or spread out work during the week