

Q&A Capture from ‘Crossing the Fatigue Finishing Line’ webinar

With Pamela Rose, Fatigue Coach

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I feel further along in my recovery than I realised, but I still struggle with “fight or flight” thinking and over-caution. How do I balance these big activities in my week without being too safe?

A:

It’s normal to still feel cautious even when you’ve improved. At this stage, it’s about *confidently* increasing your baseline—not jumping ahead, but gently increasing activity in small increments. You don’t become super-human at the finish line; pacing still matters. Even though I encourage you to feel comfortable about ‘oops moments’, this doesn’t mean you should forget how helpful it is to be considered about how much more you’re adding in – it’s about feeling confident that you might sometimes realise you’ve added in a bit too much!

In segments 3 and 4 it’s often helpful to move from strict detailed daily planning to looking at the **shape of your week**:

- Identify key features/events (work talks, social events, webinars, etc.) happening in the week ahead
- Try to spread them out so you’re not stacking “big things” together
- Review the week afterwards and use what you learn to adjust – if you realise you had a few too many features in your week, try cutting back a bit the following week and seeing if it makes a helpful difference.

There’s a difference between **smart decisions** (not doing an activity because the week is already full) and **over-safety** (automatically avoiding anything challenging). Trust yourself to choose what matters most each week. Be prepared to learn helpful lessons ‘in hindsight’.

Q2: How do I judge the right amount of walking when building endurance—especially when there’s cumulative fatigue? Should I monitor day-to-day or the whole week?

A:

When starting movement again:

- **Don’t do the new activity every day at first.**
- Many people have a 24–48 hour delay before symptoms show (post exertional malaise – PEM).

- Determine your “PEM pattern.” And use this to help you know that things are going well.

Suggested method:

1. Walk every **fourth day** (two rest days in between) to allow for a standard PEM pattern
2. If by day 4 all is feeling okay, you can feel confident this amount is achievable and can go again!
3. Keep to a consistent duration/distance
4. If you tolerate four rounds well, increase gently.
5. Only nudge up in small increments, especially at first
6. If you have a PEM flare, reset the counter and wait until you’ve had 4 manageable (non PEM) walks before increasing again.

If, however, you don’t get classic PEM and your fatigue is more cumulative or inconsistent, the approach is similar: start small, increase gradually, and wait for at least 4 comfortable walks before each increase. This way you’ll nudge up carefully and will ‘feel’ it when you get to a level where it’s more effortful – it’s usually helpful to then stay at that level for a bit longer to let your system become truly comfortable before trying to nudge up again.

I suggested using your 20% discount to sign up for my ‘How to start exercising when you’ve got fatigue’ on-demand webinar. Use code ‘SEGMENT4’ at checkout to get the discount:

<https://pamelarose.podia.com>

Read my blog to find out more about cumulative onset fatigue:

<https://www.pamelarose.co.uk/post/cumulative>

Q3: I’m doing much better but still see myself as “a person with long COVID.” How do I shift out of that old identity?

A:

Once you can tick off the **five markers** shared in the webinar, it’s reasonable to decide you’re no longer in the “grip” of the condition—even if your life isn’t yet fully back to pre-illness levels.

Recovery doesn’t mean perfection or never feeling tired. It means you’re functioning like anyone else who needs to pace and balance life. The mindset shift is often the final step. You sent this question before the webinar – I hope that now you’ve watched the main content you feel a little more confident about switching this identify?

Q4: I’m older and still get fatigued faster than friends. How do I know what’s normal ageing vs lingering fatigue? And is more progress still possible?

It's completely normal for age to influence your natural energy levels and recovery time. Everyone's baseline is different, and comparing yourself with your younger self—or with unusually energetic people—will always give a distorted picture. The most accurate comparison is with people of a *similar age, lifestyle, and general health*, and even then, energy varies widely.

That said, it's very possible for lingering post-viral patterns to sit on top of normal age-related changes. Ageing might mean you recover a little more slowly or need more rest between activities, but it *doesn't* explain the very specific cluster of symptoms that come with dysregulated pacing, post-exertional fatigue, or energy instability. If you're still noticing those kinds of patterns, they're not “just age” — they're signs your system may still have some untangling to do.

And this is the key point:

Improvement is absolutely still possible, regardless of age.

I've supported people well into their 70s, 80s, and even late 80s who continued to make meaningful gains. The nervous system is plastic throughout life. The body can decondition and recondition at any age. And the principles of stability, pacing, incremental loading, and pattern-shifting apply universally.

A couple of guiding principles:

- **Don't assume age is the limiting factor unless a clinician has specifically identified a medical reason.**
Too many people quietly “lower the bar” because they assume they've reached their age-related limit, when in reality they still have capacity to improve.
- **Use the five recovery markers as your benchmark—not age comparisons.**
If you haven't yet ticked them all, that means there is still room to progress, regardless of how old you are.
- **Nudge your activity and tolerance gently forward** unless a medical professional has advised against it. It's about steady progression, not pushing.

Ultimately, your goal is not to compete with anyone else—your younger self, your friends, or strangers online. Your goal is to build the fullest, most satisfying life *for you*. And age doesn't block that. It may shape the pace or the style of your progress, but it does not prevent continued forward movement.

Keep nudging. Keep experimenting. And let your body show you what's still possible.

Q5: I tend to overdo activities I enjoy (like gardening) and then I “dip.” Is this normal even late in recovery?

A:

Yes. Even fully recovered people get tired when they push hard—there's a chance this possibly isn't illness anymore, it's simply life. The difference is:

- You now recognise your limits
- You take breaks
- You don't feel guilty resting
- You no longer crash the way you once did

This is a sign of healthy self-management, not relapse.

However, do remember that dips still happen in Segment 4 – they're just further apart. So if you're still on your journey focus on pacing your energy is still important, even when you're close to that finishing line.

Q6: What helps with brain fog?

A:

1. Pace cognitive activity just like physical activity. Identify what triggers fog and nudge your tolerance upward slowly.

2. Some people find these things helpful:

- Matcha green tea (contains compounds that support clarity; low caffeine) (I like this one: https://www.clearspring.co.uk/products/japanese-organic-matcha-green-tea-powder-premium-grade?srsId=AfmBOor67Gn481o_cH39a1lYJGb_OjZU-E1lxiPvYM1iVMLCAfpDqjFQ)
- Lion's mane mushroom extract
- Hypnosis (anecdotal but some report improvement)

Always check supplements or interventions with a medical professional.

Q7: How do I tell the difference between normal tiredness, overwhelm, and fatigue?

A:

Start recognising their *different 'flavours'*:

- **Normal tiredness:** end-of-day sleepiness, "ready for bed."
- **Overwhelm:** mentally overstimulated, "antsy," wired-tired feeling.
- **Fatigue:** a heavier, unwell, "poorly" feeling.

Use context:

- Is it late? → likely normal tiredness
- Was it an intense or emotional day? → could be fatigue
- Are you overstimulated? → could be overwhelm

Learn your own body's versions of these sensations – unfortunately I can't give you a blueprint or fixed guide, as everyone's experience feels different. But I hope this helps!

Q8: I'm cycling again and feeling good. When is it safe to let my heart rate rise more?

A:

Early in recovery, monitoring heart rate helps prevent overdoing.

But **in stage 4**, when you're functioning well, it's usually fine to re-enter normal cardiovascular ranges—*assuming no underlying heart/other medical conditions*.

General guidance:

- Normal cardio formulas (e.g., $220 - \text{age}$) can act as loose reference points.
- Watch for heart rate shooting up too fast, or staying elevated too long afterwards – this is a sign that your system is struggling more than it should. Pause and reflect, and seek professional guidance if that feels sensible.

In a healthy system, heart rate rises proportionally and settles quickly.

(Always defer to medical advice for heart-related concerns.)

Q9: I'm hyper-vigilant. I scan my symptoms every afternoon. How do I stop this?

Hypervigilance is a very normal leftover pattern after long illness. Your brain learned to monitor constantly, and now it's just repeating a habit—not responding to danger. The good news is that patterned habits are some of the easiest to change once you interrupt them.

Use simple pattern interruption and replacement:

1. Change the first moment of the day

Keep a note by your bed and read it immediately on waking—before the scanning kicks in.

Example: *"Today is a new day. I'm looking forward to making it go as well as it can."*

This breaks the old morning sequence.

2. Replace the afternoon check-in

Instead of scanning for dips, do a quick "What's gone well today?" list of 3–5 things.

Small, ordinary positives work best.

3. Redirect gently in the moment

When you notice yourself scanning (habits take a while to change, after all!), say quietly to yourself:

"We don't do this anymore," or *"Back to the day."*

No force, no fighting—just a calm shift of attention.

With repetition, your brain learns that checking isn't needed anymore, and the urge fades. These loops change surprisingly fast once a new pattern becomes the default.

Q10: I'm doing well in segment 4 but still struggle with spontaneity. How can I regain confidence to be more spontaneous again?

A:

Spontaneity is a muscle you haven't used in a long time. Two parts:

1. **Technical readiness:** Your body must be genuinely stable (sounds like it is).
2. **Confidence practice:** You need gradual exposure to spontaneous choices.

Try:

- Start with **small, low-risk spontaneous actions**.
- Use **"structured spontaneity"** — create a list of activities that you know are achievable and pick one at random on the day. This adds spontaneity, but in a way that feels safe, and that you can feel confident about.

Over time, real spontaneity feels natural again. But it can be helpful to build up confidence first of all – it's been a while, it takes time to get used to enjoying it again 😊