

Getting started with Pacing

Before following this guide, please watch the recording of Week 2's webinar if you weren't there as it happened. This document is just a reminder/prompt - the webinar brings it all to life and explains everything in more detail.

Aim:

The goal of getting back to a more structured way of pacing, is to find a way of doing all of your 'must do' and, ideally, some 'nice to do' tasks every day, while ensuring that you keep your energy nicely balanced. You will, of course, have small peaks and troughs, but on the whole your day should feel more stable in this new routine than it does at the moment. In time, you will start to build on this and add more activity to your days. But the pace of that increase will be carefully managed.

Preparation:

Write a list of all the usual tasks that fall under these categories, and then size them. I like using T-shirt sizes (XS, S, M, L, etc) but colour coding or numbering them can also work well:

- List 1 - Daily routine must-do tasks

e.g. showering, washing/drying hair, getting dressed and ready, preparing meals, cooking meals, housework. Include cognitive tasks too - like checking or reading emails

- List 2 - Weekly housework tasks

e.g. dusting, sweeping, hoovering, cleaning bathrooms

- List 3 – 'Nice to do' things

Things that are within your current energy remit – on a good day. But that aren't critical, so don't make the 'must do' list, e.g. watching tv with family (quality time), calling a relative or close friend, receiving a visit from relative/close friend, embroidering/hobbies.

- List 4 (optional) - Menu planning

If it feels right, plan meals for the week ahead, and size those too.

If you have trouble sizing tasks, an easy way to start is to pick something that you think feels like a 'medium'. Then go through the rest of the list and consider whether that item is easier/harder than the 'medium' task you set at the start. If you think it's easier, make it small. If it's MUCH easier, make it extra small. If it's harder, make it a Large (you shouldn't have any extra larges!!).

Your lists should ideally only contain S (small) or M (medium) tasks. So if you have any that are larger than that, try to cut them into two or more 'mini tasks'. E.g. instead of 'cleaning the bathroom', which would probably be a Large task, you could split out *cleaning the toilet* from *cleaning the sink and bath*. Each of those would then be a Small or Medium task. Or think about how you could make a task smaller (e.g. switching hairdryers from a heavy professional type, to a smaller travel sized dryer).

Weekly look ahead plotter:

Using the lists above, it can be very helpful once a week to look ahead and slot tasks in across the week. This tells you at a glance, the shape of the week you have ahead.

- Look in your diary/calendar and add any 'features' of your week to the relevant day of your Plotter. Features are things that aren't routine tasks, by definition they're things that don't happen every week, e.g. medical appointments, social engagements, kids school recitals etc.
- Once you've done this, it shows you - at a glance - the type of week you have coming up
- If it's a busy week, this tells you that you'll have to be particularly careful in keeping your must-do tasks small that week, with little time for nice-to-do tasks
- If it's almost empty, great! This means there isn't much to set you off track this week
- It's perhaps more likely that a couple of days will be busy but the rest will be quieter. In this case, you know to make sure the days either side of your busy ones are a little quieter to compensate. See the example Weekly Plotter in the pacing template files, to see this brought to life.

Daily Scheduling

Then it's time to create your plan for the day:

- Either the night before, or the morning of, take time to plan out the day ahead - use your knowledge of your energy patterns to decide when you'll be best placed to do this
- Have a look at your Weekly Plotter and check if you'd noted that this day was particularly busy, or needed to be kept particularly low-level - this gives you a good starting point
- When planning your day, start with **time fixed tasks**. These are things that have to be done at a set time - e.g. a work meeting, or doctor's appointment. Pop those in to your day first
- This then shows you the shape of your day, and when you can schedule in the other things you must do, or would like to do, that day
- Focus on spreading your tasks out as much as possible, avoid bunching things up together - and intersperse with regular proactive rest periods - both **active** and **empty brain** rests types
- Take the sizes for each task from your master task lists, to ensure you're being consistent in how you're sizing them. Keep a focus on sticking to the size and spread of tasks that you know is your current baseline. See example schedule in the pacing templates document.

Scheduling tips:

- This is hopefully obvious, but worth making clear: don't fill your days with Medium and Large tasks! At least at first, keep to only a couple of Medium things from each list, and mainly stick to mediums
- Use your knowledge of your current baseline to make wise decisions about how much to do each day. For example, if it's a day that you're washing your hair, perhaps don't include any/many housework tasks (or keep it to just a couple of small tasks - and move them later in the day).

- At first you'll be testing and refining your pacing approach every day. After one week you'll have learned much more about how much you can do each day, and this will help you adjust and find the balance that's right for you.
- When you're ready to start slowly increasing your baseline add 'energy buffers' either side of tasks, particularly any that are Medium or Large. These are rest periods that will help to ensure you're ready to achieve that task, and then are able to rest after it and conserve/protect the energy you've used.
- You might have to push yourself to make some decisions around moving things to other parts of the day. For example, do you **have** to shower first thing?
- Once your day is underway, of course things can crop up that you weren't expecting and hadn't scheduled. If this happens, they're likely to have taken up valuable energy. Look across the rest of your day at what you had planned, and ask the following:
 - Is there anything you can discard or move to another day?
 - Are there tasks that you can adjust to make them lower energy?
 - Can you delegate one or more tasks to someone else?

End of day reflection:

- It will take you a week or two at least to learn what level of activity allows you to maintain that lovely energy balance
- The only way to get to that stage is by trial and error
- So, at the end of each day, look back over that day's schedule and:
 - **Reflect** how your day has gone
 - **Learn** from anything that felt it was too much or not right in some way
 - **Adjust** the next day's schedule, based on these learnings

Important final note:

Following the above steps will feel quite different, and even a bit of a chore at first. But don't worry it will soon become much easier, and eventually almost second nature. But you **have** to start with this very structured approach in order to be able to reflect, learn and adjust and ultimately build your ideal pacing approach.

Don't look at bad days as a negative - use them as a learning opportunity, and useful input to your approach. You might have to lower your activity at first, but it's very possible that you won't have to keep things that low for long, and you'll then be able to slowly include more.

I wish you every success with your new approach to pacing and look forward to hearing how it's gone!