Provincial Health Services Authority

COMPLEX CHRONIC DISEASES PROGRAM

Adapt: Returning to physical activity

Restoring movement and activity

Many people recovering from post-viral fatigue experience symptoms including weakness, fatigue and shortness of breath with activity. Engaging in safe physical activity that is within your body's energy envelope can help with your recovery from post-viral fatigue. The goal is to achieve a stable base of energy. Refer to our *"Plan: How to Pace"* handout to learn techniques to start pacing your physical activities. Along with restoring movement, incorporating relaxation and self-compassion into your routine is important.

Exercise is not recommended as an intervention to treat fatigue among people experiencing Post-Exertional Malaise (PEM).

PEM is a constellation of signs and symptoms that occur in response to physical, mental, emotional overexertion. For example minimal exertion such as walking to the bathroom can lead to worsening of all post-viral fatigue symptoms.

Tips to guide you

To get started, it is important to review the difference between physical activity and exercise. ***Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by muscles that uses energy.*** Physical activity in daily life can include household tasks, doing errands, and work. Exercise is under the umbrella of physical activity.

Exercise is a planned intentional movement intended to improve or maintain physical fitness. We gain the benefits of physical activity without needing to necessarily do "exercise" such as going for a jog. The goal is to provide a safe approach to support improvements in physical activity, quality of life and function.

Any exercise for people with post-viral fatigue should be guided by a professional with experience with this condition.

1. Benefits of incorporating movement into daily activities

- To control and improve symptoms
- To use muscles to maintain ability to perform daily tasks
- To avoid joint pain
- To find balance between movement and no movement

2. Explore what exertion looks like across all activities

- **Mental/cognitive activities** such as computer work, learning something, or reading
- **Emotional activity** such as having a difficult conversation, meeting friends, or watching an emotional film
- **Physical activity** such as exploring what activities increase your heart rate and possibly increase risk for PEM (activity too intense or too much activity). There's more information about this topic in our handout *"Plan: Measure Physical Activity"*

3. Consider how to best use your energy

- **Prioritize tasks for the day.** If you are experiencing low energy levels, prioritize activities that are essential and/or less energy-consuming. Self-care activities are a priority.

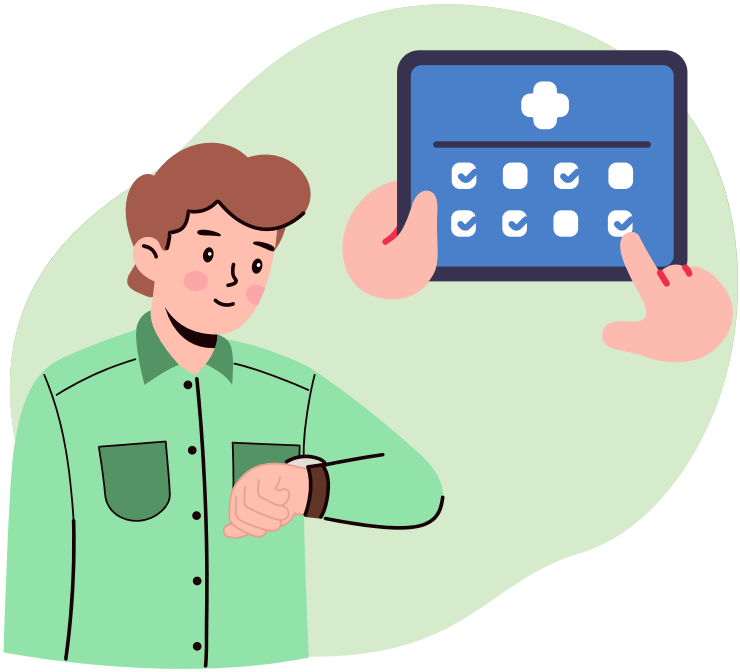
Steps to restore movement and activity

Using light movement and activities aimed at treating the whole body are important in your recovery. This can be started at any point in your recovery journey. Below we've listed five elements of movement you can add into your daily routine. This can be a way to begin to engage your whole body.

FIVE ELEMENTS OF MOVEMENT

1. **Deep breathing**: Restores lung function by using the diaphragm. Deep breathing encourages the restoration and relaxation part of the nervous system
2. **Vestibular system**: This is located in the inner ear. It controls balance and coordination, and works with information received from head and eye movement
3. **Functional patterns of movement**: These are movements that require using the opposite sides of our body (e.g. walking and reaching)
4. **Building strength**: Increasing muscle strength
5. **Endurance**: Increasing tolerance for physical activity

This approach has been adapted from the John Hopkins Medical Center



An example of activity pacing and heart rate monitoring

Mary wants to start a walking program.

- **First, Mary must calculate her anaerobic threshold heart rate.** Refer to *"Plan: Measuring physical activity*."
- **Second, Mary must determine her activity tolerance for walking,** or the number of minutes she can walk without experiencing an increase in symptoms. Mary has determined her walking tolerance is 10 minutes.
- **Third, Mary must use the frequency before duration before intensity progression.** Mary plans to walk 10 minutes 2 times per week, progressing to walking 10 minutes 3 times per week, and slowly progressing to walking 10 minutes 5 times per week. Mary is monitoring her symptoms as she progresses her walking activity. If she experiences an increase in symptoms following a progression, she returns to her previous safe baseline.

Progressions are made using the 10% rule. Mary is walking 10 minutes 5 times per week and her symptoms are stable. She uses the 10% rule, progressing her walking duration to 11 minutes. Mary is observing her symptoms following her progression, and will return to 10 minutes if she experiences an increase in symptoms.

Precautions before starting a movement program

DO NOT START a movement program if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Fever
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing while resting
- Chest pain or palpitations (fluttering of heart in chest)
- New swelling in your legs
- Feeling too unwell

STOP your movement program if you develop any of the following symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Cool, clammy skin
- Excessive fatigue (i.e., fatigue that is unusual for you)
- Irregular heart beat

Can I ever do more?

When your symptoms improve you will experience less weakness and fatigue and may want to start doing more. **It is important that you stay within the limits of your energy envelope before increasing activity** (e.g., fewer symptoms and no push-crashing).

Here are some ways you can gradually start to increase your activity level:

- **Start by adding 10% to your current safe activity level.** For example, if you are walking for 10 minutes without increasing your symptoms, you can add 1 minute to increase to 11 minutes (10% added).
- **Pay attention to your symptoms** after adding 10%. If your symptoms have increased, it is important to return to your safe activity level, e.g. 10 minutes of walking.
- **After adding 10%, consider first increasing your frequency** before adding more time (e.g. Going for an 11 minute walk, twice a week).
- **It is important to be flexible** and respond to days where more rest is needed.