



Pacing yourself



As you will know, dealing with a long-term condition can be a tiring business.

There is a lot to manage and remember. Add to that the fact that fatigue (tiredness) is a common symptom in heart failure.

It is easy to understand why so many people with this condition often lack energy and feel too worn out to do many of the things they used to enjoy.

This is unhelpful in many ways. Extreme tiredness can reduce your quality of life, and not being able to do things you love can make you feel very down. The good news is that by pacing yourself, you can save up energy, for use when you need it to do things that matter to you.

Read on for tips on how you can do this.



Conserving energy

People with heart failure are often advised to conserve their energy, so that they can 'save' it to use on activities they value. You can conserve energy by resting well before you carry out an activity. You should also rest afterwards.

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For example, if you have been invited on a trip, you could take life extra slowly for a few days beforehand, so that on the day itself you are well rested and have energy in reserve.

You should also rest well after any activity, in order to maintain an even supply of energy and to stop yourself becoming too tired or exhausted.

Another way of conserving energy is to break jobs and activities down into chunks. You can then complete the task by doing the first chunk, then resting, doing the second chunk, then resting again, and so on.

REST IS VERY IMPORTANT

Rest is an absolute necessity in heart failure, and not an indulgence. So do make sure that you plan some relaxation and rest time into every single day. It may help if you think of rest as being a crucial part of your heart failure treatment.



PACING YOURSELF IN THE LONG TERM AND IN DAILY LIFE

While your diagnosis and treatment may have distressed you initially, you will probably find that, over time, it becomes easier to integrate your condition into your day-to-day life. This is a good thing, but it does not remove the need for you to pace yourself and maintain your resources for the things in life that really matter to you.



Some things you can do to save energy in your daily life, include:

- **Organise storage**, particularly in areas that you use frequently such as the kitchen and bathroom, so that as much as possible is within easy reach. Avoid putting things you use often in high, low or difficult-to-reach cupboards — that way, you can minimise bending, stretching and general exertion.
- **Do not rush** — move at the pace you feel comfortable with.
- **Delegate tasks**, especially physically demanding tasks, wherever possible.
- **Try to rest before you feel tired.**
- **Try to find tools that save you having to bend and stretch.** Use long-handled cleaning tools, for example, and a long-handled shoe horn to put on footwear. If you can, use a dishwasher rather than scrubbing pots.
- **Avoid extreme temperatures**, for example avoid long, hot baths.
- **Try some anxiety/stress management techniques**



- **Be smart about how you use your energy**, and try not to waste it on activities or tasks that are not really going to benefit or please you.



- **Organise yourself**, in order to minimise anxiety and any need to rush. You could lay out your clothes the night before you wear them, plan your meals ahead of time, and so on.
- **Sit down when you can, and try to plan activities and trips** so that you will have opportunities to sit or lie down if required.
- **Adapt your activities to suit your energy levels.**
- **If you have more energy than expected, take advantage of it to prepare for times when you might feel more tired.** For example, you could batch cook some meals and freeze them, or use the time for pleasurable but tiring activities such as visiting friends.
- **Finally, do not forget the need to nurture yourself; physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually.** Meeting your spiritual and/or religious needs may not necessarily influence your physical health directly, but it can have a profound effect on your quality of life and other aspects of your well-being¹.



If you know what activities really matter to you, then you can prioritise them and make sure you have energy 'saved' for when you really need it. Make sure you schedule rest time for before *and* after an activity — this can make it easier for you to manage your energy levels without having to give up things you enjoy.

If you happen to have an urgent medical concern, please call your doctor, go to your local emergency room, or call your local Emergency Contact number. Remember, your doctor is your primary source for information on your condition and treatment. Be sure to speak with them if you have any questions or concerns.

References

1. Park CL, Lim H, Newton M, Suresh DP, Bliss DE. Dimensions of religiousness and spirituality as predictors of well-being in advanced chronic heart failure patients. *J Relig Health* 2014 Apr; 53(2) 579-90.