

Pain Self-Management Strategies Wheel

Each strategy has its own wedge on this wheel. Each wedge is divided into three sections. After you read about a strategy, use the key below to rate how well you think you are doing with that strategy right now. Put an X in the section of the wedge that matches how well you think you are managing it. Continue to use this wheel to track your progress.



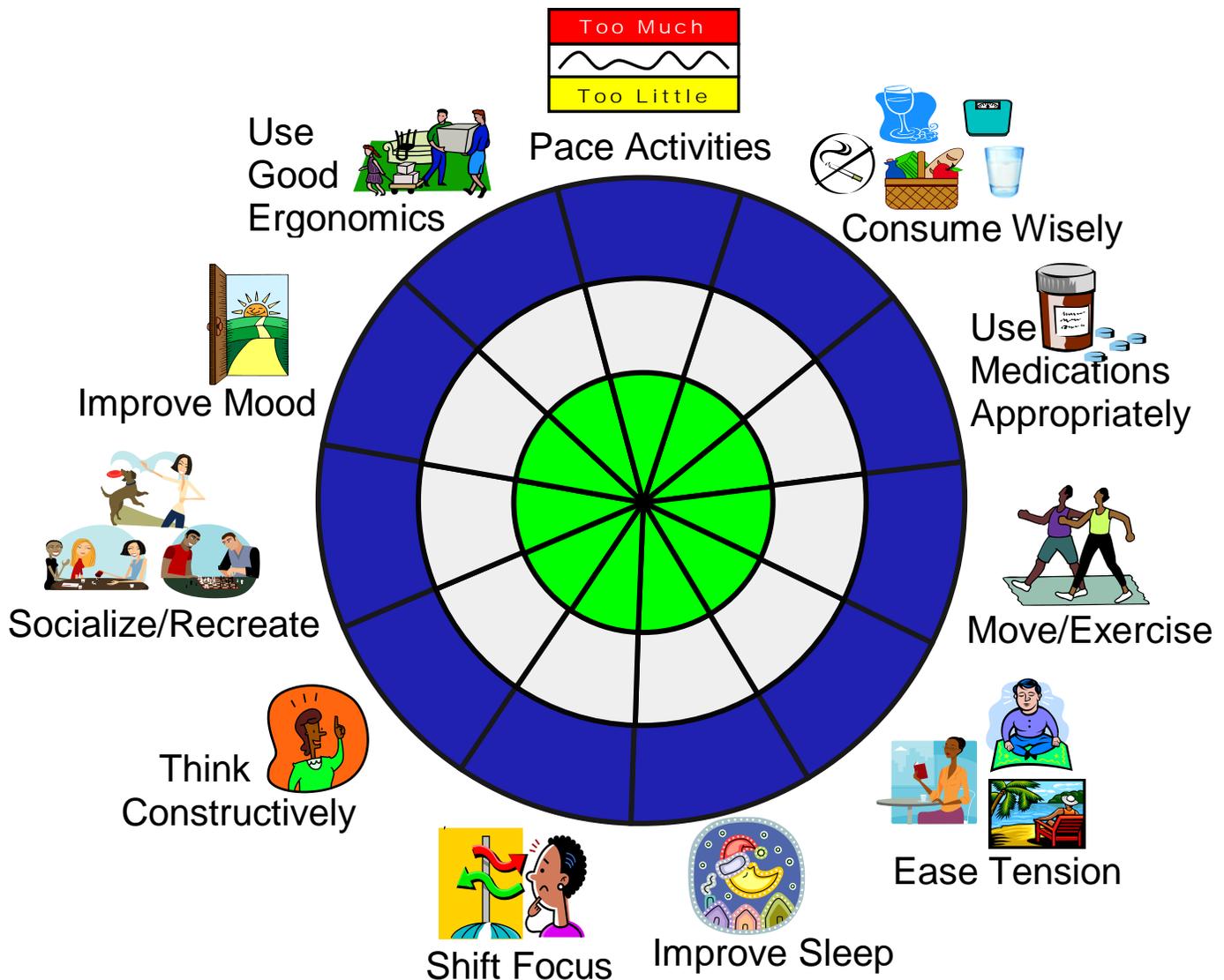
Not well managed



Fairly well managed



Well managed



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PACE ACTIVITIES

Many people who have had pain for a long time talk about having “good days” and “bad days.” They are talking about how much their pain gets in the way of daily activities. You may have tried to take advantage of a “good day” by using it as a “catch-up day,” doing all the things you couldn’t do on days when pain was overwhelming. As a result of over-doing on a catch-up day, you may have found that you’ve needed several days of rest to recover.



Effective Pacing means that you, rather than pain, are in charge of how you plan, start, stop, and change what you are doing. When you pace effectively, you can accomplish some activities every day.

Here are some examples of ways to pace your activities:

- Break up tasks into smaller parts – take rest breaks in between tasks.
- Work at a slower, less intense pace.
- Gradually increase the amount of time spent doing a specific task.
- Change tasks often and use different parts of the body throughout the day.



CONSUME WISELY

The food we eat and the other substances we consume can affect pain. Eating regular, nourishing, high fiber meals and drinking plenty of fluids are important to healing, managing pain, and staying well. **Please Note:** Constipation (difficulty moving your bowels) is a side effect of many medications. Getting plenty of fluids and regular, healthy meals can help you manage this side effect. If you have problems with constipation, please call your nurse or doctor for assistance.



Plenty of Water

Drinking plenty of water is the best way to stay hydrated and avoid constipation. It is best to limit soda, tea, or coffee.



Regular, Well-Balanced Eating

Regular, healthy eating is important for healing, medication effectiveness, maintaining your energy level, managing constipation, and managing pain. Keep in mind that some medications are best taken with food. This can help decrease nausea and avoid other possible side effects. Please talk with your nurse or doctor about the types of foods you eat, your eating patterns, and what suggestions they might have to help you eat well.



Alcohol

Alcohol may interact with medications and cause serious side effects. It may interfere with your ability to get deep, restful sleep. Alcohol may also make it harder to deal with emotions that may arise.



Smoking or Other Use of Tobacco Products

Smoking impairs healing and can interfere with your body's ability to manage pain.



USE MEDICATIONS APPROPRIATELY

Some people find it helpful to have a medication plan. Knowing the names of your medications, what they are for, how and when to take them, and potential harmful side effects can help you make an individual medication plan that works best for you.

You may have already developed a successful medication plan. For example, some people keep a written medication list or use pillboxes to regulate how medications are taken. Other people link the medication to an activity they do each day, such as taking medications with meals, when brushing their teeth, or at bedtime. Your personal medication plan will depend upon the medications you take and the information your doctor, nurse or pharmacist may give you about your medications

Suggestions for Managing Medications

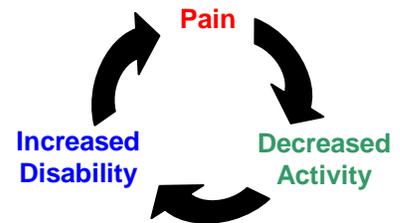
- Keep an updated file of all current medications that includes all the written instructions about your medications.
- Use a pill box with appropriate doses sorted out for each day and time the medication will be taken. Pill boxes are available at many pharmacies and drug stores.
- Use a timer or cell phone alarm to remind you when to take your medication
- Depending upon when the medication should be taken, link it to another routine daily activity such as eating a regular meal, brushing your teeth, or preparing for bed.



MOVE/EXERCISE

Participating in regular movement and exercise can improve the body's strength, flexibility, and endurance.

There may be times when it is necessary to lower your activity level due to illness or to recover from an acute, painful injury. However, this is not typically recommended for managing chronic pain. Repeated use of rest and avoidance of movement to temporarily reduce pain can lead to a decrease in strength, flexibility and endurance, and an increase in disability.



Although initial increases in movement and exercise can result in muscle soreness, this can be managed by finding the most appropriate activity and using a gradual approach. If you are uncertain about how to increase your activity level or what exercises or activities are appropriate for you, please discuss this with your health care providers.

Suggestions to Improve Exercise & Movement

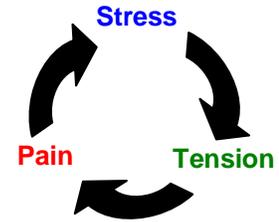
Motivation plays a large role in whether we follow through with our plans to pursue an activity. Therefore, be sure to let your nurse or doctor know what activities you most enjoy or are most likely to do. If you worry that any discomfort you might experience in response to increased activity means further harm is occurring, please let your doctor or nurse know your concerns.



EASE TENSION

Stress, Tension and Pain

You may have noticed that when stress is high, your tension levels rise and pain gets worse. On the other hand, you might also notice that pain itself can be a source of increased stress and tension. This can feel like a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.



All of us experience different levels of stress, tension, and relaxation at different times in our lives. The tension we experience in response to stress can be emotional, such as being worried, fearful, or frustrated. Stress can also affect how we think. For example, when stressed, we tend to focus more on negative events.

Our bodies may respond physically to stress, for example, with muscle tightness. Tense muscles can aggravate some kinds of pain and can use up energy that we might need for other tasks. Restoring the body's energy requires adequate rest, relaxation and proper nutrition.

Suggestions to Ease Stress & Tension

In this section you will find some ways to lower stress and restore energy through techniques designed to decrease muscle tension and improve relaxation.

Regular practice of one or more of these techniques may help you gain a sense of control over your personal experience of the **Stress – Tension – Pain** cycle. With this cycle under better control, you will have more energy and focus for making other positive behavior changes in your life.



SHIFT FOCUS

If you have found many aspects of your life pushed aside because of pain or have found that pain seems to occupy most of your thoughts and behaviors, please consider the strategy of shifting focus in order to regain more quality of life.

How Does Shifting Focus Help?

People often find that their perception of pain changes according to what they are focused on. For example, watching TV or a movie, or becoming involved in a hobby or interesting conversation can distract the mind away from pain. Participating in some enjoyable activities can help reduce attention to pain and can help you rediscover ways to enjoy life.

Brain researchers have found areas in the brain that are very active during pain episodes. These same areas can quiet down when a person in pain focuses very intently on something else. This shows that we can have some control over how much the brain is focused on processing pain signals.

A Suggested Approach to Shifting Focus

Pay just enough attention to pain to properly pace your activities and avoid doing any real harm. Otherwise, look for examples of times, even brief times, when your mind was so focused on something enjoyable or important that pain receded a bit into the background. Use these examples to strengthen your understanding that pain is experienced more intensely when you actually pay attention to it, and less intensely when you engage your mind with other activities. Start to fill your conscious awareness with other, more enjoyable things to focus on. This may take some work because the pain condition can make some former favorite activities difficult to do in the same way. However, with some effort and creativity, you may rediscover former sources of enjoyment and perhaps also discover new ones.



THINK CONSTRUCTIVELY

Thinking constructively means developing beliefs and attitudes that help you cope with pain in a more useful way. For example, a belief that managing pain is totally the responsibility of your doctor may limit you from adopting health behaviors that are known to help with self-management of pain.

Suggestions for Thinking Constructively

Take some time to review the following pain beliefs. For those that seem true for you, try to think of a more constructive way to think about that issue. For each belief, we have included at least one suggestion to help you get started. You can use that suggestion, or come up with your own constructive way of thinking about the issue.

- **My pain makes it impossible to do anything constructive or enjoyable.**
Suggested Alternative: Challenge the assumption that being productive or happy is not possible with pain. Start by taking note of the activities you are still able to do. For activities you previously enjoyed, explore ways to creatively modify them so that participation is still possible. Begin to also notice pleasurable, satisfying, or even joyful moments you've experienced since the pain condition began.
- **It is primarily the responsibility of my doctor to relieve pain.**
Suggested Alternative: Start to notice and think more about small, temporary ways you have been able to manage pain. Try to implement more of these small measures into your daily life. Talk with your medical providers about ways to build on your personal strategies and ways to combine them with medical interventions to achieve the best outcome.
- **It is best to avoid all painful activity so I do not cause more injury.**
Suggested Alternative: Ask your medical providers about what exercises and activities are safe and what kinds of pain and soreness are just harmless signs that you are beginning to use your body more. Once you have the knowledge, practice thinking of soreness as a sign of progress.
- **My attitudes and emotions don't affect how much I suffer from my pain.**
Suggested Alternative: Recognize that pain is a process influenced by attitudes and emotions. Recall the stress-tension-pain cycle described in the Ease Tension section of this guide. Think of examples of how your pain or your ability to cope with it seems to change with stress or strong emotions. Then, think about ways to manage emotions or attitudes that seem to negatively influence your ability to manage your pain.

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USE GOOD ERGONOMICS

Ergonomics refers to the interaction of the human body with work tasks and work settings. The goal of ergonomics is to design tasks, tools, furniture, and equipment in a way that minimizes risk of injury and improves efficiency. The principles of ergonomics can be applied in any setting. When we propose the use of good ergonomics, we are suggesting that you think about some of the tasks and activities you are doing and consider if there are ways to minimize the physical stresses on your body. This can include simple things like improving your posture when you sit or stand, or the way you might lift, reach for, or move objects.

Suggested Ways to Use Good Ergonomics

Here are some examples of how you might use good ergonomics. If you find it difficult to lift things from shelves that are located above your eye level, you might move the items or shelf heights to a lower level to reduce the physical stress. Your health care providers can help you learn the best way to lift items from the floor using the appropriate postures, movements, or assistive devices, depending upon your needs. If you encounter problems at work, you may want to ask if ergonomic evaluation services are available for your work area.



Self-Management Action Plan

One way I want to better manage my health is (examples: walk, stretch, do a relaxation exercise, take medications as prescribed):

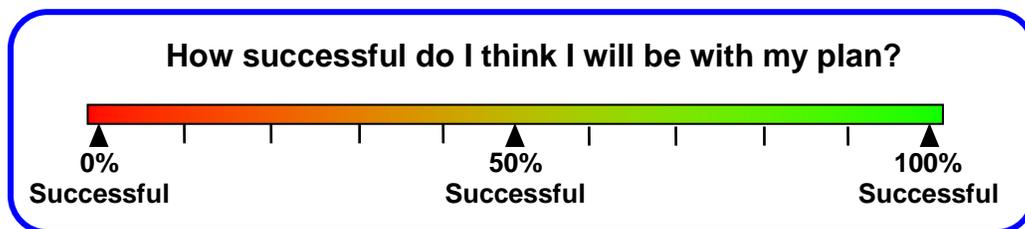
I will focus on this for the next _____ (# days, weeks).

When I will do it (examples: every day after work, Mon/Wed/Fri mornings):

Where I will do it (examples: at the gym, in my neighborhood, at physical therapy):

What might get in the way of following through (examples: I may have other things to do, it might rain):

What I will do about it (examples: pick another day, go to the gym, get rain gear):



**If I rated my chance for success less than 80%,
what improvements can I make to my plan to increase my rating?**
