Stop. Pace. Rest.

Post-exertional malaise (PEM) is a symptom that makes you feel worse after activity [1,2]. Think of PEM like a broken phone battery that does not charge properly and drains fast. When the 'body battery' gets low, symptoms worsen, and moving about becomes harder. If people keep being active without resting, the body's energy levels become very low. Just like an empty battery on your phone that has turned the colour red. We call this PEM.

Remember – your body battery is different from when you were healthy. People with ME/CFS or long COVID cannot do the same activities they could before they got sick:

- What you can do in one day will be less than before.
- Every day is different.
- Every person with ME/CFS and long COVID is different.
- You will need to make hard choices about what activities you do, to avoid making your symptoms worse.

Learning how to reduce the amount of energy you use may help reduce how sick you feel. We encourage people with PEM to learn how to:

- **Stop**
- **Rest**
- **Pace**

Step 1 - Stop

Stop what you're doing before your symptoms get worse or before you start to feel unwell. Think of your body like a phone battery — when you pause and rest, you give yourself time to recharge.

It is important to stop activity before your body's battery is red so you can charge [3,4].

Step 2 Rest

Each person is different, and what makes them feel calm and restful is unique. Some people may like to:

- Lie down in a quiet place with no noise, no light, no sound, no phone or no television.

Some people may like to:

- Lie down and listen to a podcast or music
- Find a quiet place for prayer or meditation
- Rest in a place with family
- Connect with Country
- Do a drawing
- Squeeze a soft ball in their hand
- Rest outside in the shade.

People may want to try different ways to rest and see what works best for them.

Step 3. Pace (manage energy)

Pacing helps people with PEM use energy carefully and rest more, so it is easier for the body battery to recharge. Some people need more rest than others to stop their battery from running out and turning off. The amount of rest someone needs depends on how sick they are with ME/CFS or long COVID[5].

Pacing takes practice; it becomes easier over time.

- Try to do about half as much as your body feels it can.
- Allow more time for your body battery to charge.
- Take regular rest breaks throughout the day.
- Break activities up into smaller tasks, with rest in between.
- Put feet up on the chair or couch to help improve the circulation of blood.

One example:

Instead of showering, brushing teeth and combing hair without taking a break, try resting between each activity. So, take a shower then rest until the body feels ready to do the next activity, for example: brushing teeth or combing hair.

Some people work, have families to look after or live alone. The activities in daily life can drain the body's entire battery. If this is the case for you, adding some rest to the day may be a good start.

Pacing won't fix ME/CFS or long COVID. It takes practice and you won't always get it right. But it might help people to feel less sick and allow you to do the activities you want and need to do.

Reference

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