



**Guy's and St Thomas'**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Using your energy wisely

**This leaflet explains why energy conservation is important and how it can help you. It gives advice and helpful tips about planning your activities and organising your daily life.**

## What is energy conservation?

Energy conservation means:

- using your energy wisely
- finding a healthy balance between activity and rest
- making the most of your body's available energy
- getting the most activity, such as work, done using the least amount of energy.

Energy conservation will give you more energy for other activities such as exercise and leisure.

The aim of energy conservation is to help you learn how not to waste energy, so that when you need energy, zest and sparkle, you've got some!

## Why do I need to conserve my energy?

Energy conservation can help you to avoid fatigue (tiredness), pain, shortness of breath, and activity cycling.

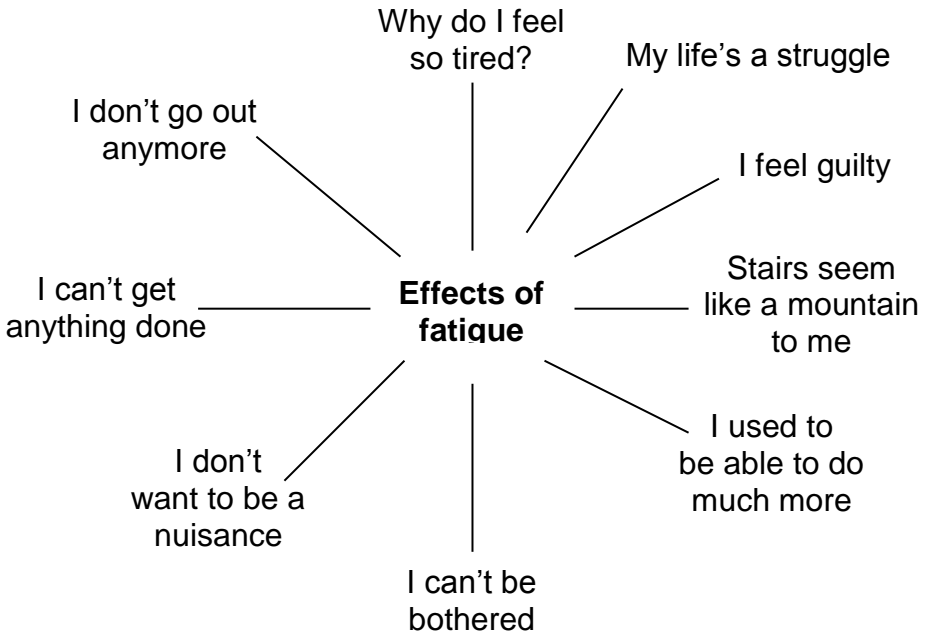
**Fatigue** (feeling weary, weak, exhausted) can make you less efficient and this can have an impact on your independence and safety. It can also create psychological difficulties. For more information on the effects of fatigue see the diagram on page 3.

**Pain** not only affects you physically, it can also affect you emotionally and affect your relationships with others.

**Shortness of breath** can lead to you avoiding activity. This can result in a reduction in independence and ability, and consequently a loss in self-esteem.

**Activity cycling** is when you get caught up in the under-activity/over-activity cycle. You do too much, feel exhausted and then stop doing everything to compensate.

## Effects of fatigue



## Tips to help you conserve your energy

- **Take frequent rests before, during and after completing a task.** Frequent short rest periods are better than a few long ones. The practice of resting before you become tired/exhausted is so effective that it should be your top priority in energy conservation. Do not fall into the 'five minutes more' trap.

- Always exhale (breathe out) during the most strenuous part of an activity. For example, exhale as you lift a heavy object or push the vacuum cleaner away from you. When bending forward, exhale as you bend down and inhale (breathe in) when you sit upright.
- Always use breathing control (as outlined in the point above) while walking or going up/down the stairs.
- Sit during as many activities as possible.
- Do not carry equipment if you can push it.
- Use both hands whenever possible while carrying items.
- Slide rather than lift objects.
- Push objects rather than pull them.
- Always try to bend at the knees rather than the waist.

For information on the benefits of energy conservation, see the diagram on page 8.

## Principles of energy conservation

### Pacing

- Don't cram your day – spread your tasks throughout the day, and throughout the week if you can.
- Allow yourself regular rest breaks, and lie down if you need to.
- Stop before you become overtired.
- Adjust your list of things to do if you need to.
- Do half today and half tomorrow.
- Alternate active tasks such as shopping and cleaning with quiet tasks such as reading post.
- Avoid rushing.

## **Prioritising**

- Question whether everything needs to be done today – can some tasks wait until tomorrow?
- Question whether you actually need to do something – is it necessary?
- Check whether you can get someone to help you.
- Don't commit yourself to things that are unmanageable.
- Set yourself realistic and achievable goals.
- Aim to complete the activities which are most important and satisfying to you.

## **Planning**

- Choose the best time of day for the activity.
- Make a list or keep a diary.
- Break a job down into stages and work out what is needed for the job. Sometimes doing things a little and often can be more effective than trying to do a task in one go.
- Think through each task – what are the basic activities involved? For example – will you be sitting, standing or walking.
- Plan ahead, organise tasks and distribute heavier activities throughout the week. Balance heavy activities (such as heavy shopping, gardening, washing windows) with light activities (such as dusting, light weeding, buying a few items from a shop).
- Organise the timing of activities to avoid unnecessary trips, for example limit the need to go up and down stairs.

Remember – if you cannot complete an activity in one breath (such as bending to tie shoes), sit up, inhale and then exhale again while bending to finish the activity.

## Your environment

Making adjustments to your home or workplace can help you with your activities. Here are some examples:

- Adjust the height of work surfaces – the ideal is half an inch below the level of your elbows when you are sitting. This will help you to avoid unnecessary stretching and reaching.
- Use labour-saving devices such as a food processor or microwave in the kitchen. Try to use utensils that are lightweight and easy to use. Clean utensils and surfaces as you go along.
- Store things you use regularly in cupboards or on shelves that you can easily reach.
- Make sure you have adequate lighting and ventilation.
- Find equipment that can help you, such as grab rails, a perching stool, equipment to help you get in and out of the bath, a long-handled sponge for washing feet/back. Your occupational therapist can give you more information and advice.
- Place a chair at the top and/or bottom of your stairs.
- Get a box to catch your incoming letters rather than having to bend down to pick them up.
- Use a remote control for your television.
- Raise electrical sockets so you do not have to bend down to plug things in.

## Relaxation

Relaxation is an important part of energy conservation. It can:

- help you to control your anxiety
- improve the quality of your life
- reduce pain and discomfort (allowing your body's natural pain relief to work more effectively)
- increase your vitality.

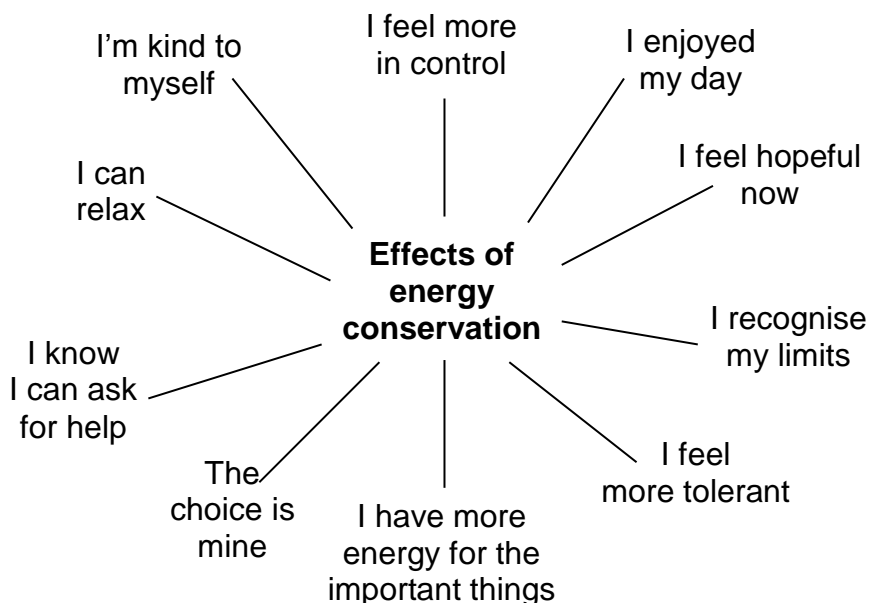
### **How to relax**

- Make time for yourself.
- Listen to music.
- Be aware of muscle tension. This can often be the cause of pain and fatigue.
- Use breathing and relaxation techniques, such as imagery. Your occupational therapist can give you more information.

## **You and your body**

- Maintain good posture. When standing have a good base support (feet hip-width apart with your weight distributed evenly on each foot). When sitting, keep your back straight and feet flat on the floor.
- When possible, push, slide or roll objects rather than lifting or pulling them.
- When you do lift, keep your back straight and bend your knees. Hold the object as close to you as you can at waist height, keep a wide base of support and use both hands if possible.
- Avoid prolonged gripping or holding of objects such as a telephone, pen, toothbrush or steering wheel.
- Exhale during the most strenuous part of an activity.
- Eat a well-balanced diet and consider food or drink supplements if you need to. Ask your occupational therapist if you need more information.

## Effects of energy conservation



### Contact details

For further information about any of the issues raised in this leaflet, please contact: **Occupational Therapy**,  
**t:** 020 7188 4180, Monday to Friday 8.30am-4.30pm,  
or **Cardiovascular Rehabilitation Team**,  
**t:** 020 7188 0946, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

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