

# Me and My Fatigue: A Self-Directed Fatigue Management Guide



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## Introduction

This booklet has been developed by occupational therapists to help you learn about fatigue and to understand the impact it can have on your life.

This booklet aims to help you to:

1. understand your personal experience of fatigue
2. understand how fatigue impacts your daily activities and routine
3. Provide you with strategies to be able to manage your fatigue

It is recommended that you work through this booklet gradually, so that you can successfully incorporate fatigue management into your everyday routine.

You can work through it at your own pace and repeat or return to different sections of the workbook as you find necessary.

## Section 1 – Understanding Fatigue

### What is Fatigue?

Fatigue can be defined as a feeling of extreme tiredness or exhaustion. This is quite different to the tiredness or exhaustion we may all feel from time-to-time. The lack of energy experienced during fatigue limits a person's ability to complete their day-to-day activities. Fatigue is frequently experienced after critical illness and often its impact is experienced through a combination of physical, mental and emotional factors. Therefore, it is important that you learn how to manage your fatigue so as to reduce its impact on your daily life.

Whilst for some people the symptoms and impact of fatigue may lessen, or many others it continues long term and never completely goes away. Many people who have fatigue will experience setbacks when the impact of fatigue can temporarily increase. It is important for you to acknowledge that it is quite normal for setbacks to happen, but these can be effectively managed if you prepare for how to deal with them. (More information on dealing with setbacks is outlined in Section 7).

### Impact of Fatigue

There are many impacts of fatigue. These can include:

Physical:

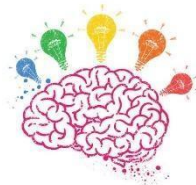
- inactivity
- low energy levels
- weakness
- reduced endurance
- sleepiness
- headache
- unable to do what you need/want to do

## Mental:

- reduced concentration
- difficulty making decisions
- impaired judgement
- difficulty remembering appointments/plans
- difficulty remembering new information
- reduced ability to problem solve

## Emotional

- feeling low in mood
- reduced motivation
- feeling irritable
- frustration



### How does fatigue impact you physically?

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### How does fatigue impact you mentally?

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### How does your fatigue make you feel?

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## **Fatigue Diary**

Now that you have identified what your fatigue looks like and feels like for you, the next step will be to track your fatigue over a period of one week using a fatigue diary. A fatigue diary is a great way for you to begin to understand if there is a pattern to your fatigue and if there are particular times when you are most fatigued in a day (for example in the morning or, evening ). A fatigue diary will also enable you to identify what daily activities may trigger fatigue for you.

Being able to identify these factors will make it clearer how you may need to adapt/change and start to manage your experience of fatigue on a daily/weekly basis. You may find it beneficial to complete a fatigue diary every few weeks to keep yourself on track.

## **How to Complete Your Fatigue Diary:**

You should use your fatigue diary to keep a record of:

1. what activities you have been doing during the day and when these activities have taken place.
2. how fatigued you are feeling on a scale from 0 (no fatigue/able to easily complete daily tasks) to 10 (severe fatigue/unable to complete daily tasks).
3. hours of sleep each night.

Note that for ease of use the fatigue diary is broken up into hourly time slots, however it is possible that you may have multiple activities documented within a one hour timeframe.

An example of a sample day from a fatigue diary is provided on the next page.

A blank template of a fatigue diary for you to copy/use can be found on page 33.

## Fatigue Diary (1 Day Example):

Monday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am	Woke up at 7am. Breakfast 7:30am.	0	8	
7am – 8am	Shower, dressed, dried hair.	5		I did too much this morning and needed to sit down for a long while after.
8am – 9am	Laundry.	7		
9am – 10am	Sat and watched TV.			
10am – 11am	Sat and watched TV.			
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm	Made and ate lunch.	3		
1pm – 2pm	GP Appointment.	8		Surprisingly tired after the GP – needed a rest.
2pm – 3pm	Had a rest.			
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm	Online shopping			
5pm – 6pm	Made and ate dinner with John.	6		
6pm – 7pm	Did the washing up.	7		
7pm – 8pm	Reading.			Relaxing
8pm – 9pm	Reading.			
9pm – 10pm	Got ready for bed and went to sleep.	4		Went to bed on time!
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

## Section 2 – Understanding Energy Conservation

### Fatigue and Your Daily Activities

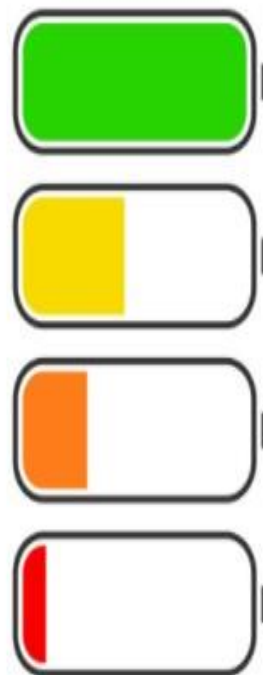
To further understand the connection between fatigue and your daily activities – try to think of your body like a battery.

Consider the **green zone** to be when you have plenty of energy to engage in the activities that you need and want to do. This may be when you first wake up in the morning, or during the day after a rest period. Your body is not fatigued and has sufficient energy levels.

However, as you engage in a single activity or complete activities throughout the day, your energy levels will decrease, and you may find yourself in the **yellow zone**. You may be feeling tired and your energy levels have decreased.

However, if you complete a task that is over-taxing, do not take rest breaks as needed or try to do everything at once, you are likely to experience fatigue. This **amber zone** is when you have very low energy levels remaining. In other words, your battery (body) needs to “charge up.” It is important to be able to recognise the signs of when you are in this zone so that you can take a rest break.

If you do not take the time to “charge up”, then you will risk falling into the **red zone**. In this zone you will experience burnout, reduced productivity and reduced engagement and struggle to complete your everyday activities.



Take a look back at your completed fatigue diary - highlight and make a list of your daily activities that you feel have:



- Kept you in the **green zone**
- Placed you in the **amber zone**
- Placed you in the **red zone**

### Green Zone Activities

### Amber Zone Activities

### Red Zone Activities

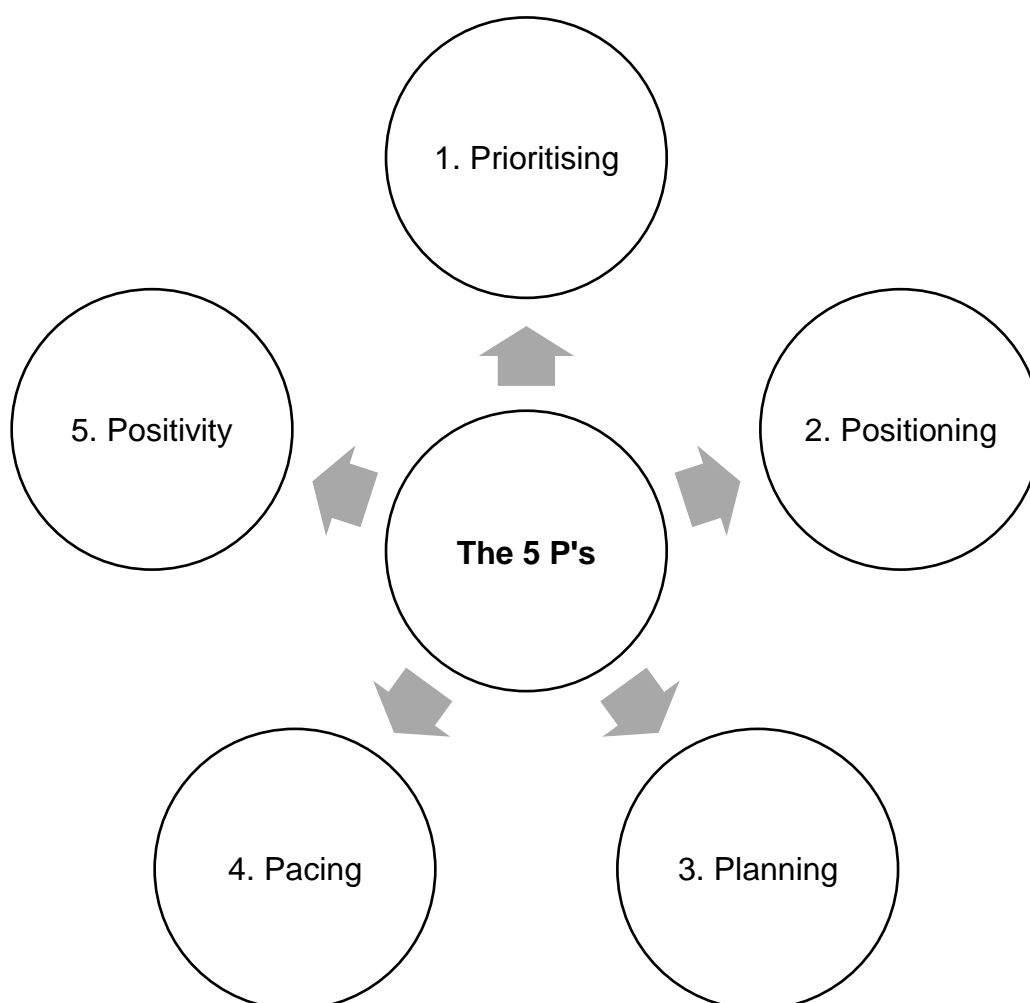
## What is Energy Conservation?

Energy conservation refers to the way that certain strategies are used to adapt how day-to-day activities are completed. This ensures that a person has the energy levels required to complete the activities that they need and want to do every day.

Incorporating energy conservation strategies into your daily routine as well as when completing your daily activities, can reduce the impact of fatigue.

## The 5 Ps of Energy Conservation

The diagram below shows the 5 Ps of energy conservation. Each of the strategies below will be discussed in more detail later on.



## Section 3 – Prioritising and Positioning



### Prioritising:

Prioritisation of daily activities can ensure that key tasks get completed when you have enough energy, and can assist you to spread out activities during the week. It can support you to

effectively

plan your day and week, particularly if you have any appointments, visits or events. However, it is important to remember to prioritise the activities that promote wellbeing and leisure for example hobbies, interests and meaningful activities, to ensure that you have a balanced weekly routine.

Questions that you can ask yourself to help you prioritise your daily activities are:

- What do I need to do today?
- What do I want to do today?
- What can be done tomorrow, or wait until the end of the week?
- Can another person do this for me?
- When is the best time for me to do this activity?



**Use the tool on the next page to practise prioritising your activities for this week.**

How to prioritise:

1. List the activities or tasks you need/want to complete in the week.
2. When your list is completed, decide whether you consider these activities to be of high, medium or low importance. Put the tasks that are most important to you in the high priority category.
3. Consider if you can delegate any of these tasks to another person.
4. Identify if any of these activities will be green, amber or red.

My Activities	High	Medium	Low	Delegate



## **Positioning:**

Poor posture and some movements (such as twisting, bending down or overhead reaching) place strain on the body and consequently can cause an increase in fatigue. Therefore it is important to consider how you position your body when completing a daily activity.

To help you achieve a good posture when sitting, ensure that you are sitting upright with both feet placed flat on the floor. You can use pillows to support your sides and behind your back for comfort and support. Try to avoid slouching or slumping down.

Signs that mean you might need to adjust your posture:

- Muscle aches
- Stiffness in joints
- Discomfort
- Tiredness

Some tips to remember when completing daily activities are:

- If you are already feeling tired, could the task be completed sitting instead of standing such as ironing?
- Give yourself a surface to lean on if necessary
- Use taller stools or a perching stall for counter level tasks
- Use long-handled aids for support as needed for example a long handled reacher “helping hand” tool, shoe horn or sock aid

## Section 4 – Planning



### Planning:

After prioritising, you will now need to plan/organise both when and how you will complete your daily activities to manage your fatigue.

For example, planning can help you to structure your day and week

so that more demanding activities or ones that will take longer to do are completed when you have more energy and that rest breaks are actively used.

Planning your daily activities ahead of time enables you to think about how they can be completed so that you use and save your energy in the best way for you.

Things to consider when planning your day/week:

- Spread out any taxing activities throughout the week. These are likely to be activities you identified that risk placing you in the amber or red energy zones
- Have a balance between strenuous and easier activities during the day. After a strenuous activity have a rest break or complete a relaxing low energy task
- Look back at your fatigue diary and use this to identify when you could/should have taken a rest break. Then schedule these into your day – remember having multiple short rest periods spaced throughout the day are better than taking one long rest at the end of the day

To understand this practically, let's use hoovering as an example of a strenuous activity. See the example snapshots from a weekly fatigue diary below as to how this activity can be planned to manage fatigue.

Example:

Monday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Any Additional Comments
10am – 11am	Hoover the living room	7	
11am – 12pm	Rest – sit down and read		
12pm – 1pm	Make lunch	2	
1pm – 2pm			

Tuesday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Any Additional Comments
1pm – 2pm	Make lunch and sit down to eat	3	
2pm – 3pm	Hoover the hallway	5	
3pm – 4pm	Watch TV	2	
4pm – 5pm			

Thursday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Any Additional Comments
2pm – 3pm	Hoover bedroom	6	
3pm – 4pm	Read Newspaper		
4pm – 5pm		3	



Pick an amber or red activity that you identified from your fatigue diary – how can you spread this activity out during the week? What rest/activity might you need to take?

Activity: \_\_\_\_\_

Day of Week	Spread it Out	Rest
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Things to consider when planning a daily activity:

- Where are you going to complete a task? – is there enough space, lighting, is there a chair or stool close by?
- Gather all the items you need for a task before you begin and have them within easy reach – this will avoid unnecessary walking/additional movements during the task
- Allow sufficient time for completing your activities
- Will you need to take a rest break before, during or after an activity?

Below are some suggestions of how to plan some everyday activities. For further examples visit <https://www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy>.

Daily Activity	Plan
Getting dressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have any long handled aids such as a shoe horn or sock aid within reach</li> <li>• Looser clothing is easier to put on</li> <li>• Lay out clothing/outfit the night before</li> </ul>
Showering/ Washing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have items within easy reach in the shower</li> <li>• Instead of using a towel to dry use a towelling dressing gown</li> <li>• Use dry shampoo/shampoo caps</li> </ul>
Cooking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Earlier in the day gather all the items required</li> <li>• Prepare different parts of the meal throughout the day</li> <li>• Have a chair/stool close by</li> <li>• Have a prepared meal such as a “ready-meal” or something to reheat if you might feel too tired to cook and prepare food</li> </ul>



Now you pick a daily task – use the prompts below to think about ways you can plan it.

Daily Activity	Plan
	<p data-bbox="469 456 863 495">Where will you complete it?</p> <p data-bbox="469 730 759 768">What will you need?</p> <p data-bbox="469 1115 1331 1207">Where do you keep these items normally? Can you move these items to make it easier for you to gather/access them?</p> <p data-bbox="469 1503 1302 1594">Can this task be broken down into smaller chunks that you can complete throughout the day? If so, list them.</p>

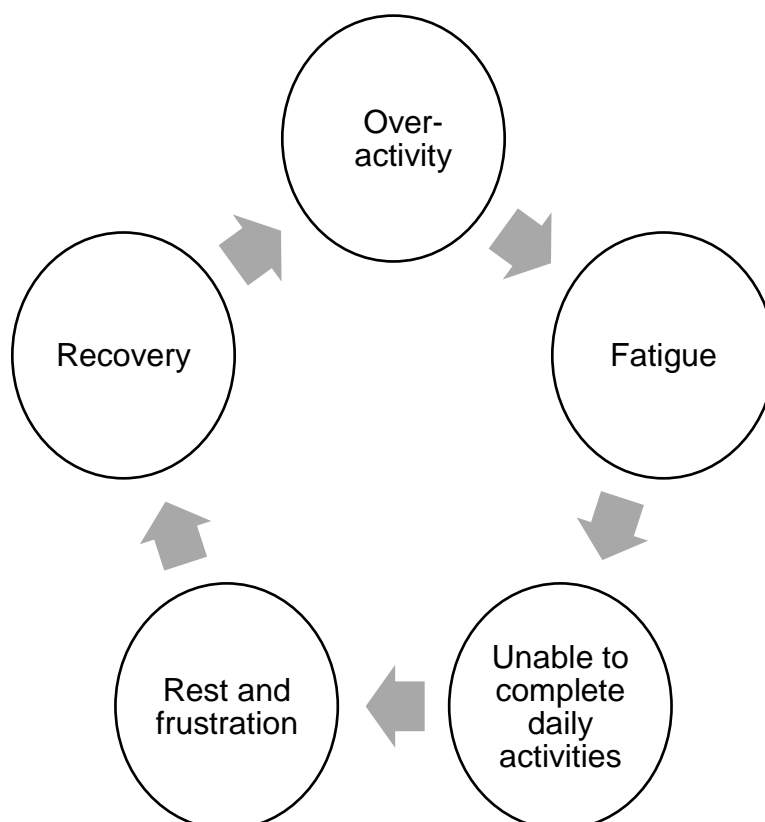
## Section 5 – Energy Conservation



### Pacing:

Pacing is important when completing daily activities so that you can prevent or manage any symptoms of fatigue that limit your engagement, for instance pain, breathlessness and weakness.

Pacing should enable you to have sufficient energy to be able to do the things you need/want to do. It can be tempting when you feel like you have a lot of energy to do too much too quickly. This often leads to burnout. By engaging in activities steadily and consistently, pacing can prevent you from triggering this “boom and bust” cycle.



There are different ways of pacing your daily activities – it will be important to try the different ways of pacing to discover what works best for you. Remember to incorporate pacing methods when planning your daily activities. You may need to be aware when completing a particular activity of how long it takes for your symptoms of fatigue to set in so that you know how/when to use pacing methods.

## Methods of pacing:

- Take short rest breaks during an activity
- Listen to your body – you may feel tired but stop or pause before you become exhausted
- Complete activities at a slow and steady pace – avoid rushing as this can increase your fatigue symptoms such as breathlessness that can increase fatigue
- Use a timer to prompt you when to take breaks or to remind you how long you are going to spend on an activity
- Try to manage your breathing:
  - Complete deep breathing – take 6-10 deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth.
  - Complete a breathing square – inhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 4, hold for a count of 4.

## Examples of how to pace daily activities:

Daily Activity	Pacing Methods
Getting dressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Get dressed in a sitting position</li> <li>● Take a short rest break between your top half and bottom half while dressing</li> </ul>
Showering/ Washing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete sitting down with an appropriate chair at sink or using a shower stool. You may prefer to use a bowl in a different room</li> <li>● Allow additional time to complete the task</li> <li>● Take short rest breaks during the task for example wash the top half of your body, then wash the bottom half of your body wash and then wash your hair if you feel you have enough energy</li> </ul>

<p>Cooking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Try to do as much as possible sitting down or using a perching stool at the counter</li><li>● Have required items at counter height to avoid over-reaching, bending or additional walking during the task</li><li>● Take a rest break prior to starting</li><li>● Break the task up into smaller parts that are spaced out to be completed throughout the day</li></ul>
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Choose 3 daily tasks from your fatigue diary and think about how you can pace them to help minimise your fatigue.

Daily Activity	Pacing Methods

## A Rest Break versus a Rest Period

A rest break while completing a task means literally stopping/pausing what you are doing for example not engaging in the activity or task. A rest break in a seated position can allow for optimum recovery.

People can often experience feelings of guilt towards rest periods due to a fear of “doing nothing”. However, a rest period during the day is a time where you do not use up much energy and actively rest as part of your recovery. This may include activities such as sitting having a cup of tea, sitting watching TV, meditation, sitting listening to music or an audiobook or reading.

To encourage you to prioritise rest periods to balance your daily routine is it important to acknowledge what might stop you from taking a rest period.



### What are the things that may stop you from taking a rest?

### How can you challenge this?



## **Positivity:**

Utilising energy conservation strategies successfully can be a trial and error process. People can experience feelings of disappointment or frustration when strategies do not work on the first try. Negative emotions and thoughts can further contribute mentally and emotionally to fatigue. It is therefore important to try to maintain a positive attitude.

Try to remember:

- some days you will feel more tired than on other days, so do not be disheartened if you do not manage to complete all your planned tasks in a day. This is ok!
- ask others for help when you need it
- try relaxation techniques (such as breathing exercises or meditation.) or relaxing activities.
- to prioritise activities that you enjoy in your day to maintain wellness, mood and life balance.

## Section 6 – Goal Setting

Setting yourself goals each week can be useful to maintain motivation and provide you with a sense of achievement, and evidence has shown that it helps you to achieve what is important to you.

### Setting a Goal

It is important when setting yourself a goal that it is both realistic and achievable. One way to do this is to make your goal **S.M.A.R.T.**

**Specific:** Your goal needs to be clear.

**Measurable:** There should be a clear way for you to measure your progress so you can identify when your goal is met.

**Achievable:** Your goal needs to be something you can succeed in doing.

On a scale of 1 to 10 if 1 means you are highly unlikely to achieve your goal and 10 is definitely you will achieve it – you need to be able to say that your chance of you achieving this goal is 7/10.

**Realistic:** Your goal needs to fit in with your routine and daily life and be something that you want to work on.

**Timely:** Your goal should have a set time frame to be achieved within.

For example you may want to be able to exercise regularly. Now let's make this a SMART goal:

**Specific:** I will be able to walk outdoors regularly.

**Measurable:** To be able to walk for 15 minutes three times a week.

**Achievable:** I think that the likelihood of achieving this goal is 8/10.

**Realistic:** This is something that I really want to work on.

**Timely:** I plan to do this within the next week.

To recap:

Original goal: To be able to exercise regularly

SMART goal: To be able to walk outdoors for 15 minutes three times a week. I think that the likelihood of achieving this goal is 8/10 and I plan to achieve this over the next week.



**Think about a goal you currently have.**

How can you make this specific?

How can you make this measurable?

What is the likelihood of you achieving this?

Is it important to you?

When will you achieve this by?

**Your SMART Goal:**

## Challenges with Goal Setting

There are several reasons why you might not rate the likelihood of you achieving your goal as 7/10.

These can include:

1. Your goal is not specific enough for instance “I’m going to exercise” – this does not say what type of exercise you plan to do
2. Your goal is not measurable for example. you have not said how long you will exercise for or how many days each week
3. You have been over ambitious for example. You may have said you’re going to exercise every day when you have not been exercising any day so far. It would be better to start with exercising for a smaller amount of time or less frequency
4. Your goal is not realistic – you do not really want to achieve this goal or it is not important to you.
5. Your time period is not appropriate – you may need to allow a few weeks to achieve your goal.

## Things to Remember when Goal Setting

1. You need to review your goal – if you have met it, celebrate this, but if not then think about why not and review was it really SMART enough  
  
Is the goal that you have just written SMART enough?      **YES   NO**
2. Write down your goal and share it with someone who can remind you about it.  
  
Who can you share your goal with? \_\_\_\_\_
3. A small goal is just as important and rewarding when achieved as a large goal – therefore you may find it beneficial to set yourself a combination of shortterm and long-term goals. A rule of thumb is that a short term goal is designed to be completed in a few days or a few weeks, whereas a long term goal might take six months or more to complete.



**Make a SMART Short Term Goal:**

**Make a SMART Long Term Goal:**

## Section 7 – Dealing with Setbacks

As briefly mentioned in Section 1, setbacks can occur for people with fatigue, and it is important to recognise this.

There are a number of things that may trigger or contribute to a setback. The following are a few examples, but there may be others that you experience that are not on this list.

- taking on too much
- doing an activity for too long
- not pacing, planning or prioritising properly
- stress and anxiety
- periods of illness
- low mood
- poor sleep
- setting high expectations for yourself



**Try to identify what might cause you to have a setback:**

Here are some ways that could help you cope with setbacks:

- revisit some of the exercises and strategies in this booklet
- plan rest periods

- gentle exercise – stopping being active because you feel tired can lead to further fatigue!
- prioritise what is most important to you right now
- be kind to yourself
- talk to someone/ask for help
- self-care and relaxation – consider a massage, a relaxing shower/bath, reading a book, listening to music or mindfulness



### What are 5 things you can do to help you cope with a set back?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Who can you ask for help?

## General Wellbeing

### Exercise

Although with fatigue you might feel reluctant to engage in any exercise, it is important to keep your body moving. In fact, long period of inactivity are a contributing factor to fatigue. However, it is important to recognise that your return to exercise is likely to be gradual.

For further information visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/>

### Diet

Your body needs food to make energy. Therefore it is important to eat meals regularly throughout the day and to maintain a balanced diet. Remember that hydration (drinking water regularly) is key! Not doing so can lead to dehydration which can lead to increased fatigue.

For further information visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/>

### Sleep

Getting sufficient sleep will contribute to feeling more rested when you start your day and assist with rest/recovery overnight. Here are some tips to aim to get good sleep

- keep a regular routine for the time you wake up and go to sleep each day
- wind down and relax before bed
- put away devices with bright screens such as phones, tablets and TV
- avoid taking naps during the day

For further information visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/how-to-get-to-sleep/>

## Useful Resources

British Lung Foundation

<https://www.criticalcarerecovery.com/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/self-help-tips-to-fight-fatigue/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness/>

Visit your local council website for information on local volunteer agencies that can assist with shopping/medication collection if needed

# Patient Information

Monday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

# Patient Information

Tuesday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

# Patient Information

Wednesday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

Thursday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

# Patient Information

Friday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

# Patient Information

Saturday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				

# Patient Information

Sunday	Activities Completed	Fatigue Level (0-10)	Sleep (hrs)	Any Additional Comments
6am – 7am				
7am – 8am				
8am – 9am				
9am – 10am				
10am – 11am				
11am – 12pm				
12pm – 1pm				
1pm – 2pm				
2pm – 3pm				
3pm – 4pm				
4pm – 5pm				
5pm – 6pm				
6pm – 7pm				
7pm – 8pm				
8pm – 9pm				
9pm – 10pm				
10pm – 11pm				
11pm – 12am				



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<https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/contact-us/accessible-information/>

## Document history

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