



## Be Pain Smart – Fatigue

### The ‘Boom and bust cycle’

When you have chronic pain, it is normal to have ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days. It is important to resist doing too much on a good day, which can trap you in a ‘Boom and bust cycle’, making it harder to manage pain and fatigue. Be patient, pace yourself and build up activity bit-by-bit.

#### Imagine this...

One morning you wake up early feeling less pain than normal and you can move a bit easier. You feel you are finally having a good day and decide to tackle the long list of jobs you have been putting off.

You work hard all day, with only a few rest breaks because you have not had a good day for a while and decide to do as much as possible. You feel you have your pain under control and plan to do even more the next day.

You go to sleep feeling happy that you have got all those jobs done.

#### What do you think happens the next morning?

You guessed it – you wake up and your pain is worse than normal, your whole body and all your joints are aching. This is a bad pain day. After a few hours of broken sleep, you drag yourself out of bed and barely manage to shower and have some breakfast. You cannot even move enough to start the jobs you had planned for today.

Nothing can distract you from the pain, so you spend the day either resting in bed or slumped on the couch. The pain medication you take does not help. You start to worry that you are having a bad flare-up or that something new is wrong. It all gets too much for you and you end up snapping at your family. You finally fall into bed, but you do not sleep well. The next morning your pain is worse and is bad for another three days.

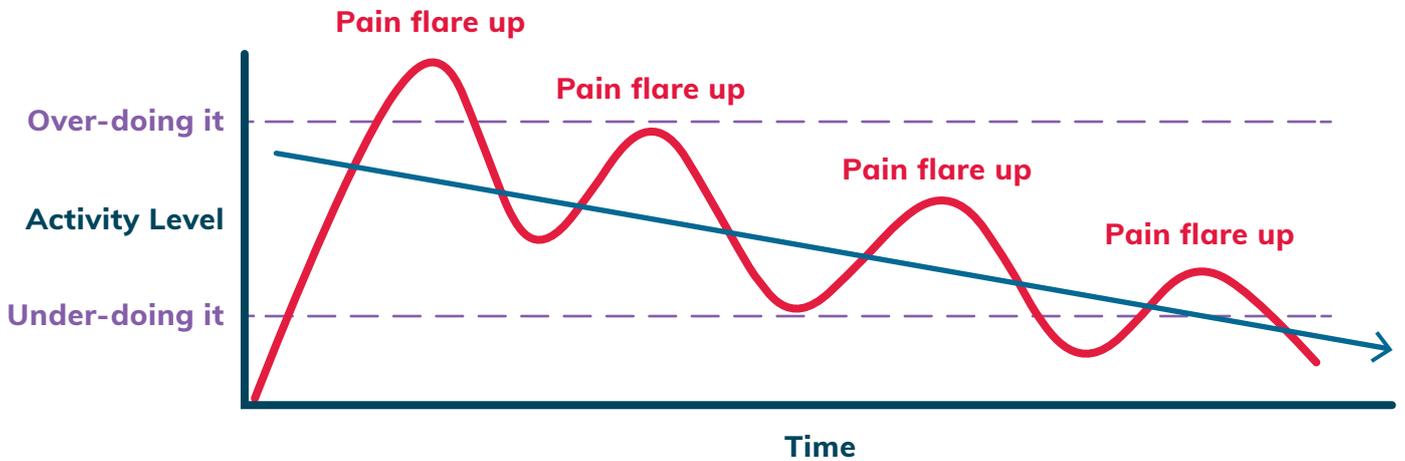
#### Does this sound familiar?

This is called the ‘**Boom and bust cycle**’ of chronic pain.

When you have chronic pain, it is normal to have ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days. You can get trapped in this cycle. When you over-do it on the good days, you will need to rest too much on the bad days. Over time, you will be able to do less and your pain will get worse.



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If this cycle continues, you will have fewer good days, and your bad days will last longer and be harder to recover from. It can be hard to plan ahead because you do not know when you will have a good day.

To get out of this cycle, you need to do the same amount of activity everyday, on both good and bad days.

Steadily working on a project or goal can make you feel good and more confident that you will be able to manage your pain. It is hard to know if you are doing too much or not enough – try the tools in the [‘pacing’](#) section to help you get the right balance. The trick is to manage your energy so that you are slowly building it up bit-by-bit. This will help you to manage fatigue and pain.

Be patient – you may feel frustrated because it takes a long time to see progress. In other areas of life, pushing through the pain can be a successful way to get ahead, but unfortunately with chronic pain, the more you push through your pain, the more your pain will push back and get worse. To manage your pain, you need to pace your activities and slowly build bit-by-bit. All the hard work and patience will be worth it.



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### Does the ‘Boom and bust cycle’ feel familiar to you?

If so, think about the last time you went through a boom and bust cycle. Here is an example from Franco, who had a brain injury five years ago and has chronic back and shoulder pain.

**What happened during the boom – the good days? Think about what you could and could not do and how you felt.**

*I was able to mow the back and front yards. It was such a relief to get these jobs done.*

*I did not need to rest at all, and I was also able to take the kids to the park for over an hour.*

*I felt great – my wife was so happy as well.*

**What happened during the bust period – the bad days? Think about what you could and could not do and how you felt.**

*The next day I could barely move and stayed in bed most of the day. I was so down and angry.*

*I got really cranky, yelled at the kids and had a fight with my wife.*

*I could not understand why my pain was worse today and I could not get anything else done all day. I had to take extra pain medication and now I might not have enough to get me through next month.*



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### What could you have done differently?

*I guess it was a mistake to do so much in one day. It would have been better if I had stuck with my pacing plan.*

*Even though it felt great getting those jobs done, I felt even worse over the next few days and this caused a problem with my family.*

### What would happen over time if you stuck with the 'Boom and bust cycle'? What would that mean for how you manage your pain?

*Even though it feels great on those 'good days', I know that if I keep going with the 'boom and bust cycle' in the long run, it will only make my pain worse.*

*Also, on the 'bad days' I cannot do much at all. I know if this continues, I will be able to do less, with more pain. I worry that the frustration I get on the 'bad days' will cause problems with my wife and kids.*



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What would happen over time if you stopped the 'Boom and bust cycle'? What would that mean for how you manage your pain?

*It would be hard to do this because it is really tempting to do more on the 'good days', but I know that if I keep to my pacing plan, my days would be more consistent, and I would be able to build my activity levels and my strength.*

*At the start I would get a bit frustrated, but I know over time I would be less stressed and anxious, and more in control of my pain. It is worth giving it a try for a few months to see it works.*

**Remember, consistency is the key – build slowly and you will gain momentum.**



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Now it is your turn, think about the last time you went through a boom and bust cycle and fill in the sections below.

**What happened during the boom – the good days? Write down what you could and could not do and how you felt.**

**What happened during the bust period – the bad days? Write down what you could and could not do and how you felt.**



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Write down what could you have done differently?

Write down what would happen over time if you stuck with the 'Boom and bust cycle'?  
What would that mean for how you manage your pain?



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Write down what would happen over time if you stopped the ‘Boom and bust cycle’?  
What would that mean for how you manage your pain?