

Moving with pain: management principles



These three principles can help residents with pain participate in and undertake physical activity safely.

1. Pace and grade activities

- Increase activity in increments to avoid pain flare-ups
- Gradually increase the amount of physical activity as a safe way to build confidence and function without exacerbating pain (which risks putting people off physical activity).
- Plan incremental increases (graded exposure) in activity levels to work towards specific goals.
- Use a “paced” approach to give residents a way to break everyday activities and exercise into smaller bits. They should do little bits often or find the middle road between not overdoing and not underdoing activity. The aim of pacing is to avoid a flare-up of pain while remaining engaged in valued activities.
- Take frequent, short breaks, before pain worsens and forces the resident to rest. This is key.
- Use trial and error to discover how much a resident can do before pain worsens. Residents may require you to prompt them to rest earlier than they usually might.

2. Modify activity

Use modifications to reduce strain, discomfort and agitation, such as:

- Break up activities into smaller parts
- Change tasks frequently and use different parts of the body often
- Consider providing props to ease strain on the body with prolonged activity
- Consider the use of assistive devices
- Consider environmental factors, such as:
 - Music to reduce pain and anxiety (especially familiar music)²³
 - Reduced light and noise levels
 - Access to green space

If you need adaptive equipment or aids, visit the Independent Living Centre website: ilcaustralia.org.au

3. Manage flare-ups

Although the above strategies hope to avoid flare-ups, a flare of pain is normal and part of the learning process. Strategies to help when a flare-up occurs include:

- Reassuring residents that a flare-up is normal and that it will pass
- Distraction i.e. listening to music, having visitors, watching TV, art therapy
- Avoiding excessive rest – keep the body gently moving
- Appropriate medications