

Managing daily activities – a practical example

When an activity increases pain, we tend to either avoid the activity (see Fear Avoidance Cycle **HE3241**) or have to deal with increased pain after doing the activity. Some increase in pain is part of the chronic pain condition and can or should not be avoided. However, some activities lead to a prolonged (one, two or three day) of inactivity. Inactivity due to pain flares causes all the negative effects outlined in the fear avoidance document and although you are encouraged to remain active and engaged, there are ways you may be able to change the way you tackle the activity that is less pain provoking.

Boom/Busting

For example: Charlie likes to keep her grass short, but every time she mows the lawn, she is in pain thereafter. Charlie's weekly schedule tends to look like this:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed.	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning - early	Exercise Shower Dress Breakfst	Dress Breakfst	Stay in bed	Shower Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Exercise Shower Dress Breakfst
Morning - late	Part-time work	Mow the lawn 80 min	Shower Dress Breakfst	Laundry	Weekly shop	Vacuum home	Clean kitchen
Lunch time	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Afternoon - early	Home admin.	Shower Lie down	Lie down	Lie down	Home tasks	Craft	Gentle gardening
Afternoon - late	Part-time work	Lie down	Lie down	Home tasks	Part-time work	Part-time work	Gentle gardening
Dinner time	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner
Evening	Cards with friends	Watch TV	Watch TV	Watch TV	Watch TV	Dinner with friends	

For a couple of days after the physical challenge of mowing the lawn, she is in more pain and does less of the things she would like to do. Importantly, the pain increase lasts longer now than it did a while ago and it is harder for Charlie to get back to normal routine.

Can you think of any activity that predictably and regularly take you out of action?

Activity Chunking

Charlie decided to mow the lawn in smaller chunks. She had noticed that her pain often started to ramp up a little after 25 minutes and even more after 45 minutes, but she could push on to finish the task (60 minutes).

Charlie decided to stop just before her pain would have increased after mowing for 20 minutes. She struggled to step away leaving two thirds undone, but found that she could carry on with the day with only a short rest period or increased pain the next day. She repeated this 20 minute mowing two more times in the week and in this way is now able to mow her lawn each week without stirring up her pain. Her weekly schedule now looks like this, so over the course of the week she is managing to do more AND mowing her lawns.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed.	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning - early	Exercise Shower Dress Breakfst	Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Shower Dress Breakfst	Exercise Shower Dress Breakfst
Morning - late	Part-time work	Mow part of the lawn 20 min Shower	Part-time work	Mow part of the lawn 20 min Shower	Part-time work	Mow part of the lawn 20 min Shower	Clean kitchen
Lunch time	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Afternoon - early	Home tasks	Home admin/ rest	Home tasks	Home tasks/ rest	Weekly shop	rest	Gentle gardening
Afternoon - late	Vacuum house	Part-time work		Part-time work		Part-time work	Craft
Dinner time	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner
Evening	Cards with friends	Watch TV	Spend time with friends	Watch TV	Watch TV	Dinner with friends	

After a couple of months, Charlie may tolerate to mow for 30 minutes twice a week.

How long before pain changes with your activity? Like with Charlie we suggest you chunk it to just below that time frame. Over time you might be able to extend this.

Graduated Activation

Had chunking of the activity not allowed Charlie to manage her lawns, her other option would be to approach this activity more gradually.

From a practical perspective, Charlie would have needed (to accept) some support for a few weeks or months as she is building up her tolerance.

- Spending some time each day to visualise herself mowing her lawn.
- Once she could visualise mowing the lawn without increasing her pain, progress to mowing the lawn in small amounts, **2-5 minutes to begin with**, three times a week
- Once she achieved this repeatedly, she can slowly increase the area and time she is mowing in small (1-3 min) steps.
- If she has a flare-up, she might go back a little, but keep mowing for the shorter period of time as she knows this has not caused her pain flare

Record your own schedule

If there are activities in your week or month that cause you to be out of action for the next day or more, record your schedule across the week. Recording the time frame you have engaged in the activity is helpful to figuring out how to chunk these in order to set up a more sustainable schedule. How can you plan out your week, to do the things that you want to and need to do – not what you think pain will let you do?

	Monday	Tuesday	Wed.	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning - early	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day	Get ready for the day
Morning - late							
Lunch time	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Afternoon - early							
Afternoon - late							
Dinner time	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner	Prepare and eat dinner
Evening							

See if you can create a new schedule chunking this painful activity across the week.

Take charge! Kōkiri