

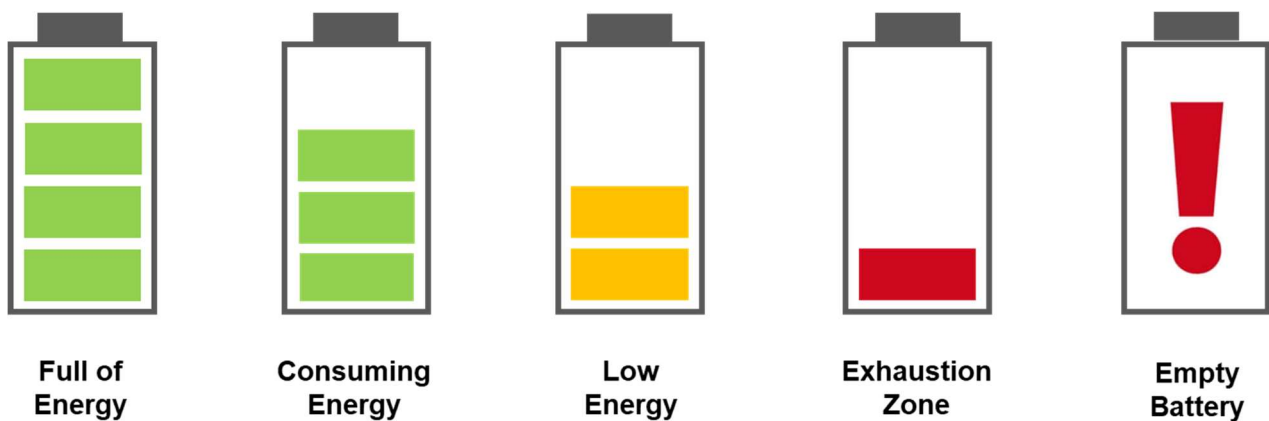
Session 1:
The Fundamentals of
Fatigue Management



The human battery

A helpful analogy is to think about the body as having a human battery. Having conditions such as ME/CFS and Post-COVID fatigue greatly reduces a person's battery capacity, and their ability to recharge effectively.

Many people find they start their day in the Low Energy zone because their battery does not reach 100% overnight.

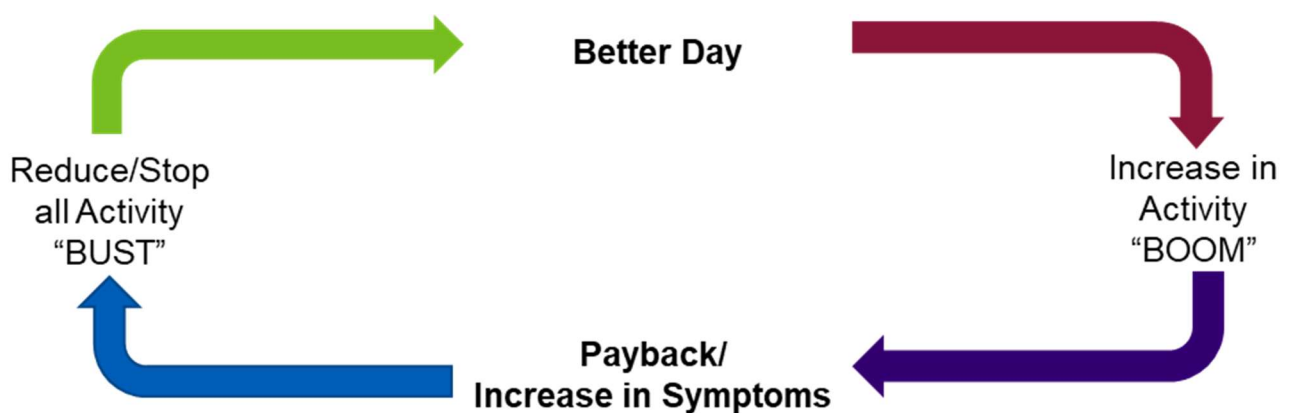


It is important to remember that all activities have an energy tag which depletes the human battery, whether they are physical, cognitive or emotional activities. Ask yourself what depletes your battery and what helps to top it up.

The over / under activity cycle

Most people with chronic fatigue find their energy levels will fluctuate. At times, they may feel they have a little more energy and as a result, engage in more activities. However, this can then lead to an increase in fatigue and subsequently, to longer periods of enforced rest.

This is the typical '**Boom and Bust**' pattern associated with chronic fatigue. The Boom and Bust pattern can occur over a day, a week, a month, or a longer period of time.

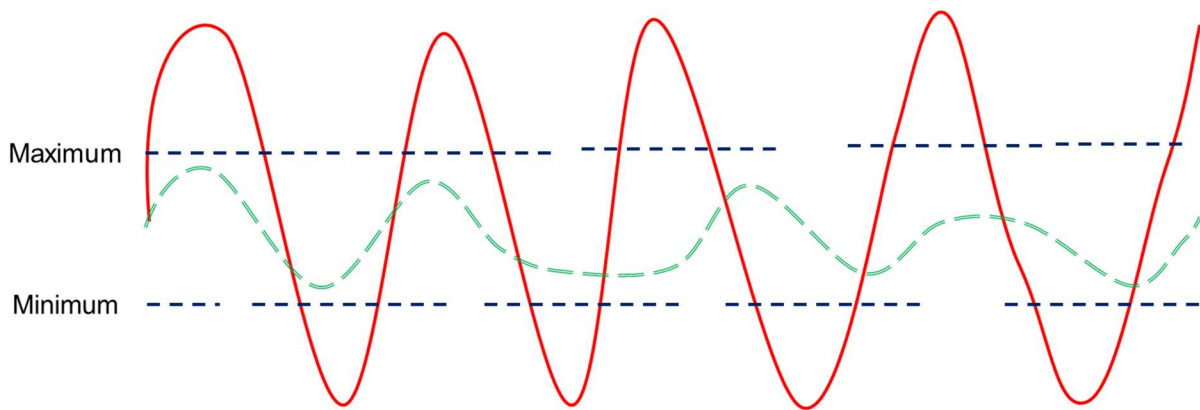





It is therefore important to establish a baseline level of activity that you can sustain. Going beyond your baseline of activity can also cause **Post-Exertional Malaise (PEM)**, which is an excessive level of fatigue or an increase in symptoms, usually experienced 24-48 hours after doing too much.

Finding your baseline can take time to establish because 'over activity' or 'excessive rest' will differ from one person to another. Your fatigue may still fluctuate, but by trying to keep within your baseline of activity, your energy levels may become more stable overtime.

Discovering your baseline of activity

Many people find it difficult to know where to start to find their baseline level of activity. Some carry out activities to their maximum capacity, or push through every day, which can cause an increase in symptoms or PEM. Others may limit the activities they do, which may help to stabilise symptoms in the short-term, but not over a prolonged period, and could lead to feeling 'stuck in the mud'.

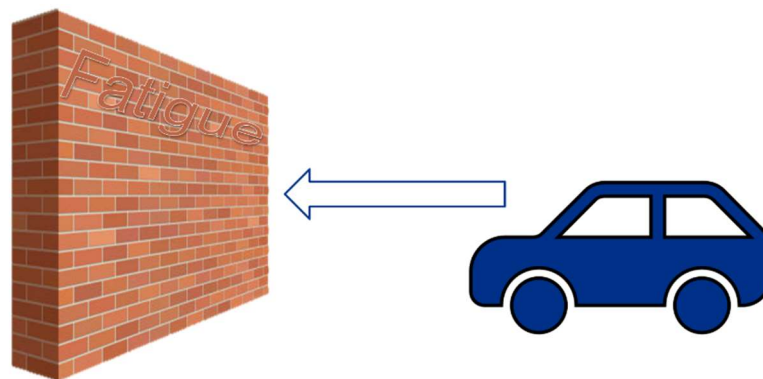


Key:	 Setting maximum and minimum energy levels
	 Energy use in a 'boom/bust' pattern
	 A pattern of optimum energy use = baseline level of activity

For those who find themselves in the boom and bust pattern of activity, the following analogy may be helpful.

Establishing a braking distance

Imagine a car's braking distance. Brakes need to be applied to allow time for the car to slow down, to avoid hitting the wall. An important part of fatigue management is recognising when to apply your brakes, to avoid hitting 'the wall of fatigue'.



When to apply the brakes

- **Early warning signs** (e.g. headaches, irritability, word finding problems)
 1. What early warning signs do you notice?
 2. Do you respond to these signs when you need to?
 3. Could you make further changes with this?
- **Setting time limits** (e.g. setting alarms or reminders)
 1. Do you set time limits on certain activities?
 2. Has this been helpful?
 3. Could you experiment with setting time limits for other activities?
- **Chunking activities** (e.g. reading one page or cleaning one room at a time)
 1. Do you break activities down into smaller chunks?
 2. Has this been helpful?
 3. Could you experiment with chunking any other activities?

Using activity diaries

We encourage you to complete your own activity diary as they can be very helpful to:

- Recognise helpful or unhelpful activity patterns, such as boom and bust.
- Recognise what activities deplete or top up your battery.
- Help establish realistic routines for activity e.g. sleep, rest and mealtimes.
- Find opportunities for helpful change.

A useful first step to starting an activity diary is to give some thought to the energy demands required for all the things you do.

To achieve this, consider whether a task involves a **high energy** expenditure (drains your battery quickly) or a **low energy** expenditure (drains your battery more slowly).

In addition, it is important to consider the emotional or cognitive demands of a task or situation, as these may also cause your battery to drain more quickly.

Consider using a chart to help categorise your activities before putting them on your diary (see end of this session for a blank chart).

Example activity demand chart

Activity	High	Low
<i>Examples:</i>		
<i>Showering</i>	✓	
<i>Washing Up</i>		✓
<i>Paying Bills/ paperwork/ phone calls</i>	✓	
<i>Watching TV / Scrolling on phone</i>		✓

Effective rest

Effective rest is an essential part of activity management as it allows you to conserve your battery. It can support you to recharge physically and mentally, and potentially reduce the need for daytime sleep. Research shows that it can also help you to manage stress more effectively and strengthen your immune system.

Rest is most effective when both mind and body are as calm and relaxed as possible.

The boom and bust pattern of activity can result in periods of enforced and unplanned rest, which can be very frustrating. Planning and scheduling effective rest, as part of your daily activity management, can help you pace your activities throughout the day. This helps you feel more in control by avoiding those periods of boom and bust.

Rest analogies

There are two useful analogies we use in the service that can help you give yourself permission to rest.

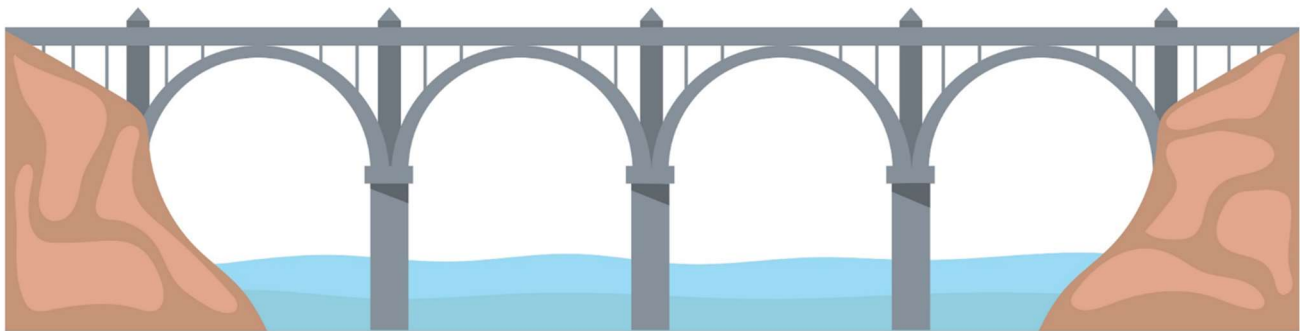
The first analogy is to think about rest being a **'Prescription'** that you plan and take regularly to help you manage your fatigue.



The second analogy is to think about **'Pillars of Rest'**.

Imagine your day as a bridge of activity. If you only had a pillar (such as sleep) supporting the bridge at the beginning and at the end of the day, it would collapse in the middle.

Now imagine your day as a bridge with regular pillars of effective rest. These pillars, together with night time sleep, help support your energy levels and engagement in activities consistently throughout the day.



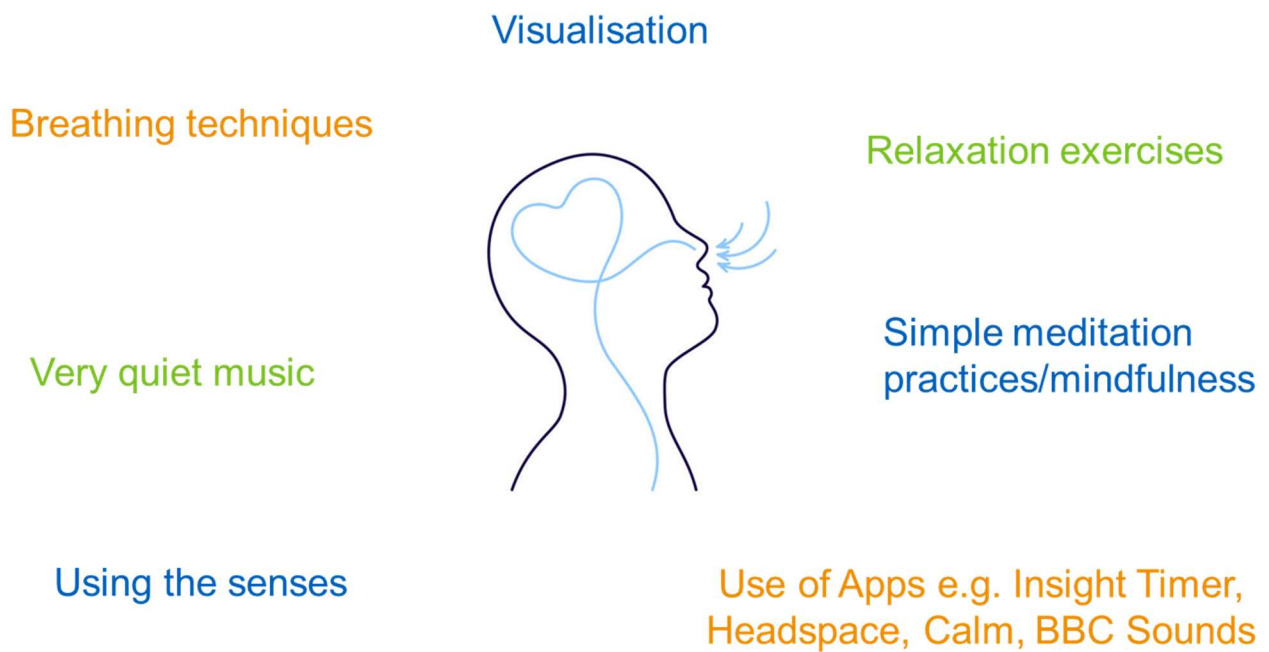
It is helpful to give yourself permission to plan 'Pillars of Rest' and explore what 'effective' rest means to you.

Not planning or taking your 'Pillars of Rest' may lead to prolonged periods of unplanned and enforced rest, which can perpetuate the boom and bust cycle.

Top tips for effective rest

- Explore a variety of techniques and resources to find a few that work for you.
- Techniques vary and encourage you to focus on your senses, your body, and / or your breathing. Visualisation can help the mind focus on positive scenes and experiences.
- Practices can be done lying down or sitting in a supportive chair.
- Find a space which is warm and comfortable for you and minimise distractions.
- See rest as an activity in its own right.

Ideas for effective rest



It might be helpful to discuss with your family and friends how they can best support you to make time and space for your effective rest.

Reflections for session 1

1. What information from Session 1 (The Fundamentals of Fatigue Management) did you find most useful?

2. Have a go at completing the Activity Demand Chart:

Activity	High	Low

3. Could you find a new effective rest activity to form one of your 'Pillars of rest'?