



GUIDE

Occupational Therapy

Energy conservation and work simplification techniques



The Ottawa Hospital | L'Hôpital
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*The Ottawa Hospital
Occupational Therapy Department
613-737-8368*

Occupational Therapist

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Do you become easily fatigued?

Fatigue is a feeling of lethargy, shortness of breath or palpitations that occur during or after an activity. It affects your ability to function and your independence in everyday activities.

Following a lengthy hospital stay, patients often tire more easily than they used to. This results in deconditioning due to lack of activity and can cause a loss of strength and endurance. If you have a chronic condition and you find that your energy level is low, it becomes more important to learn about managing your energy.

Energy conservation reduces fatigue

Energy conservation simply means reducing the amount of energy that is required to complete an activity. It's all about finding a balance between rest and work in your life. This document will give you many suggestions on how to expend less energy while you are completing your daily activities.

The four principles

Prioritize which activities need to get done today.

- Activities that could be delayed until tomorrow, delegated to someone else or deleted from your schedule (ex. make your bed, walk, do laundry, go to the bank or wash your car) will help to conserve energy.
- You have to learn to recognize your personal abilities and tolerances and work within them.

Plan your day ahead so that the activities that require the most energy coincide with the time of day that you are at your best.

- Alternate the easy activities with the ones that are more difficult.
- Organize and break down your activity to save time and decrease unnecessary movements.

Pace your activities. Take regular rest breaks before you get tired or begin to feel pain.

- Break down the hard jobs into smaller tasks. Give yourself enough time to complete the task.
- Don't try to get it all done at one time.
- You will be able to accomplish more in the end by resting between activities.

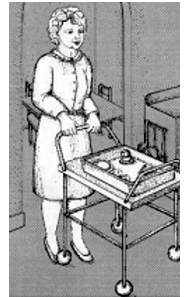
Position your body in the most comfortable position.

- Often, sitting is best because it requires 25% less energy to do the same task seated than it does if you're standing.
- Find yourself a good armchair that supports your back.
- Make sure the seat is high enough. Your legs require less energy to push off from a higher surface.
- Your work surface should be about 2 inches lower than your elbows.
- Your heart needs to work harder when you have your arms above your head.
- Arrange work area so that frequently used items are between shoulder and waist height.

Quick tips

In the kitchen

- When washing dishes or peeling vegetables, sit on a stool or walker seat at the sink. Open cupboard doors underneath sink and place your legs/knees into this space. Getting closer will be more comfortable for your back.
- When working in standing, use a foot stool or open the bottom cupboard and rest one foot at a time on the ledge. This will help reduce pressure on your lower back.
- Use electric appliances such as food processors, electric can openers, electric mixers and dishwashers if available. Put them away on the counter so that they are close at hand.
- Carry objects on a cart or in apron pockets and pay attention to weight distribution. Slide them across the counter instead of lifting them.
- Put non-slip mats underneath bowls to eliminate the need to hold them while stirring.
- If you have the space, do your dishes only once a day and let them air dry in the dish drainer.
- Cook larger portions so that leftovers can be frozen for another meal.
- Cook whole vegetables with the skins on, or buy frozen or canned vegetables.
- Steam your vegetables instead of boiling them. That way, you don't have to drain a heavy pot of hot water.



- When reaching for ingredients or equipment, avoid bending down. It's better to sit on a chair to reach something down low (unless you have had a recent posterior hip replacement).
- Use lightweight pots and pans, and large-handled utensils to make gripping easier and to reduce the risk of dropping a hot dish.
- Have your groceries delivered and placed on the counter or table top to avoid having to bend down to pick them up.
- Rest the joints that you have been using during your task. For example, if you have been chopping food, let your hands rest for a few minutes before continuing.

Washing, dressing and grooming

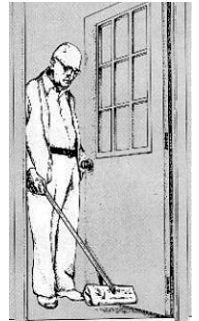
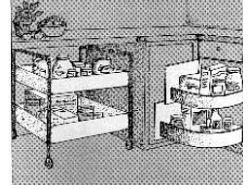
- Bring everything you need all at once into the bathroom, to avoid coming and going.
- Choose clothes that are easy to put on and maintain, such as Velcro shoes, loose fitting clothes or pants with elastic waistbands that are wrinkle-resistant.
- Do not bend at the waist to reach down. When washing/dressing, start with your feet since they are the hardest to reach and will require more energy. Cross your legs to put on socks (unless you have had a recent posterior hip replacement). Use long-handled equipment to pull up pants or slip on shoes. Stand only once to pull up your pants and underwear.
- Use a long-handled sponge/comb/hairbrush; you will avoid holding your arms over your head for too long.
- When you come out of the shower/bath, put on a lightweight terry-cloth bathrobe to help dry yourself and avoid unnecessary movements of your arms.



- Use grab bars, a hand held shower, a raised toilet seat and a shower chair.
- Fasten your bra in the front and then turn it around.

All around the house

- Ask someone to rearrange cabinets/ closets/refrigerator. Store heavier or most used objects in easy to reach places: between shoulder and waist level.
- To avoid going up and down the stairs too often, keep one set of cleaning supplies upstairs and one downstairs (i.e. light-weight vacuum, broom, “Swiffer” mop).
- A long handled reacher reduces the need to bend.
- Keep the washer and dryer on the main floor of the house if possible.
- Place a bench near your front door. It can be used for storage (i.e. scarf, umbrella and slippers) and will allow you to sit down while you put on your shoes.
- If something is too tiring, ask for help and delegate. Choose to engage in activities that are important to you and that you know you can accomplish.



Sleep

- Taking a short nap (no more than 40 minutes) can reduce fatigue and is one way to recuperate. However, try to remain fairly active throughout the day so that normal fatigue sets in around bedtime. Daily exercise will also increase strength and stamina in the long run. You will be less fatigued during your everyday activities.

- Do something relaxing before going to bed, such as taking a warm bath or listening to soft music. Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation or visualization (ask OT for more information).
- Remember that all change requires practice and patience. You must be open and willing to make changes in your lifestyle in order to incorporate energy conservation techniques.
- Don't forget to keep some energy for your leisure activities. We encourage you to share your personal experiences regarding energy conservation and work simplification techniques with your family and friends.

References

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