



The University of Texas at Austin  
UT Health Austin

## Managing Long COVID Fatigue: Tips and Resources

### What Is Long COVID Fatigue?

Fatigue is one of the most common and debilitating symptoms of long COVID. Unlike ordinary tiredness, long COVID fatigue can leave you feeling physically and mentally drained, even after small tasks. Rest alone may not relieve this fatigue, and it can significantly impact your daily life.

### Types of Exertion

Fatigue can result from many types of exertion—not just physical activity. Since all types of exertion add up, managing your overall energy use is crucial.

- **Physical Exertion:** Walking, household chores, exercise
- **Orthostatic Exertion:** Standing for long periods
- **Cognitive Exertion:** Holding conversations, processing information, using technology
- **Sensory Exertion:** Loud or repetitive noises, bright lights
- **Emotional Exertion:** Stress, anxiety, difficult interactions, grief
- **Environmental Exertion:** Allergens, weather changes, strong odors

### What Is Post-Exertional Malaise (PEM)?

Many people with long COVID experience post-exertional malaise (PEM)—a worsening of symptoms following activity that exceeds their energy limit. PEM often begins hours or even a day after exertion and can last for days or weeks.

#### Symptoms may include:

- Extreme fatigue and weakness
- Fever, headache, dizziness
- Muscle or joint pain
- Gastrointestinal issues

### Why It Matters

Crashing pushes your body into a cycle of overexertion followed by prolonged recovery, delaying overall improvement. Avoiding crashes through pacing is key to managing long COVID fatigue.

## How to Avoid Crashing

The best way to prevent PEM is through pacing—staying within your energy limits and gradually increasing activity over time.

- **Define Your Limits:** Identify how much activity you can handle without worsening symptoms. Start small.
- **Adapt and Expand Slowly:** Break tasks into smaller steps with regular breaks. Gradually increase activity over weeks or months. Be patient with yourself.

## Practical Tips for Pacing

- **Prioritize and Plan Ahead:** Focus on necessary activities, structure your day, and cut your daily activities by half if needed to find a manageable baseline.
- **Track Symptom and Energy Use:** Use a symptom diary or a wearable device, such as the Visible app, to monitor patterns.
- **Follow the 80/20 Rule:** Use only 80% of your daily energy, saving 20% for unexpected needs.
- **Don't Push Through Fatigue:** Overexertion can worsen symptoms over time. Listen to your body.
- **Be Mindful of Passive Energy Use:** Even screen time, reading, and watching TV require cognitive energy.
- **Recognize Emotional Triggers:** Intense emotion can contribute to PEM. Consider limiting news, social media, or stressful conversations.
- **Communicate Your Needs:** Set boundaries—sit when needed, pause conversations, or request breaks.
- **Prepare for a Crash:** Rest before planned exertion and have a recovery plan in place.

## Additional Resources for Pacing and Fatigue Management

Visible App  
(iOS and Android)



Bateman Horne Center  
Long COVID Education



Bateman Horne Center  
Crash Management Guide



#MEAction Pacing and  
Management Guide



ME/CFS & Fibromyalgia  
Self-Help Pacing Tutorial



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