



Royal Berkshire
NHS Foundation Trust

Occupational Therapy and energy conservation

Information for patients

What is energy conservation?

Energy conservation is a technique that can help you adapt the way you complete your daily activities so that you use less energy, feel less fatigued and put less strain on your body. It can also help you to adapt your environment to provide the best support when carrying out day to day activities. Energy conservation techniques aim to improve your quality of life by helping you to conserve your energy for activities you want to do, as well as those you feel you have to do.

What is occupational therapy?

It is a healthcare profession offering support to those who need to overcome barriers and to enable them to live life to the fullest. Occupational therapists (OTs) help people engage as independently as possible in the activities that enhance their health and wellbeing. This helps to increase people's independence and satisfaction in all areas of life. (*Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2024*)

How can it help me?

When you have been inactive, even for 24-48 hours, your body becomes weaker – known as 'deconditioning'. Regaining lost abilities, such as the strength and stamina to complete daily activities, can often take twice as long as losing them.

By developing energy conservation skills you can reduce the amount of energy / effort, and therefore oxygen, which your body uses when completing everyday activities. This can reduce feelings of fatigue, pain and breathlessness and when completing activities, you will be more comfortable and have increased self-confidence and independence.

Remember: Energy is like money in the bank; spent it wisely. Repeated over-spending can put you in debt physically and mentally, as well as financially.

Conserve, Control and Thrive:

The 4P's of Smart Energy Management

Pacing	Planning
Pacing means balancing activity and rest to avoid overexertion and prevent crashes or flare-ups. The goal is to stay within your “energy envelope”—the amount of energy your body can safely use without triggering symptoms. • If possible sit to complete an activity, especially if it will take longer than 10 minutes to complete - sitting uses less energy. • Wait until an hour after eating to complete an activity; this is because digestion draws blood, with its oxygen, away from muscles, which leaves them less able to cope with increased demands.	Planning means organizing and scheduling activities ahead of time to manage energy wisely throughout the day. Planning is essential to avoid ‘boom and bust’ days. A boom and bust day refers to a pattern where energy usage alternates between periods of high consumption (boom) and low consumption (bust) within a short timeframe, often a single day. • Plan a week in advance to ensure strenuous tasks are spread out. Use a simple to-do list/calendar. • Inform others how they can help you and build in rewards to keep you going. • Plan activities so that all required items are to hand before you begin, you are then saving energy.
Prioritisation	Positioning
Prioritisation means identifying and focusing on the most important or effective actions and activities to reduce energy use and improve efficiency. • Do not take on more than you can handle, say no! • Simplify activities and eliminate unnecessary steps • Don't allow yourself to be overburdened by old habits; you can save an amazing amount of energy by adapting your method.	Awareness of your physical position while completing activities of daily living. Reduce over-stretching/standing for long periods of time. Organise your workspace so things are in easy reach. • Keep most items between eye and knee level to reduce bending, stretching and lifting. • Exhale on exertion when carrying out activities.

Energy Conservation Weekly Planner							
Time of day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Lunchtime							
Afternoon							
Teatime							
Bedtime							

Using energy conservation techniques in your daily routine

Self-care:

Showering / Bathing:

- Wash your lower half first then your top half.
- If you find steamy atmospheres make your activities more difficult, use luke-warm water and keep the bathroom well ventilated – leave the door open.
- If bathing, let the water out of the bath and move from sitting to kneeling before getting out of the bath as this may be easier.
- Hair washing is easiest in the shower; alternatively, sit in the bath with a straight back and use a jug or hand-held shower unit. If someone can help you, even better.
- Instead of using a towel to dry yourself, put on a towelling dressing gown and sit down until you feel dry.

Bring your legs up to your chest, as opposed to leaning down to your legs.



Showering / Bathing equipment recommendations:

- Use a shower stool or a bath board to reduce time spent standing.
- Consider using long-handled aids to avoid bending down to your feet and reaching to your back.
- Keep showering items within easy reach.
- Use a hanging basket to keep items tidy and at a height easily reachable in the shower/bathroom.
- Sit down on a toilet/suitable stool to clean your teeth, washing your face or applying make-up.
- Use easy-to-grip, large handle items. Adding rubber bands around handles provide a better grip.

Dressing:

- Gather what you intend to wear in one place near where you dress.
- If possible, sit down to undress, wash, dry and re-dress.
- Dress your lower half first as this requires most energy and also upper body clothing doesn't restrict your movement.
- When performing activities that require your arms to be above shoulder height, e.g. washing/combining hair or brushing teeth/dressing, inhale as you raise your arms and exhale as you carry out the activity. Rest after each exhalation.
- Do not restrict your chest or abdomen; for this reason it is best to avoid tight bras and belts.
- Wear full slip on shoes or slippers rather than lace-ups, to reduce bending
- When dressing, if you have a painful limb, dress this first and undress it last. Wear lightweight separates in the summer to allow body heat to escape and layers in the winter to conserve body heat.

Wear loose fitting or elasticated clothes that fasten at the front.

Dressing equipment recommendations:

- Consider purchasing a button hook if you struggle with fine motor movement in hands.
- If reaching your feet is difficult, use a long-handled shoe horn and/or sock aid.
- Reduce the amount of bending you are doing; place your foot on a foot stool, bend your leg and place your ankle on your opposite knee or use long-handled aids to reach your feet.

Daily living:

Cooking:

- Consider using technology/electrical appliances to reduce physical exertion, including slow cookers, air fryers, cutting tools, blenders, electric tin openers and microwaves.
- Buy and use items/appliances that are light weight and easy to move around the kitchen.
- Plan your meals when you're not hungry or tired, so you are equipped to prepare well-balanced meals.
- When cooking, ensure there is good ventilation to let the steam evaporate.
- Sit down to complete tasks such as preparing fresh vegetables, wash dishes and to cook.
- Avoid peeling vegetables by purchasing frozen or pre-peeled fresh vegetables.
- Use a plastic jug to fill the kettle rather than lifting the kettle to the taps.
- Position items together, e.g. tea, coffee and sugar with the kettle near the fridge.
- Position items in easy to reach places to reduce bending and reaching.
- If you're able to, cook large quantities and divide food into individual portions for freezing, so they are ready for use at a later date.
- Break down complicated meals into stages.
- If you struggle carrying items, use a trolley to transport drinks and food.



As a general rule of thumb, lots of small meals are preferable to a few larger meals.

Domestic tasks:

- Break cleaning into small manageable stages taking plenty of rest breaks – seated if required.
- Have two sets of cleaning products, one upstairs and one downstairs, to avoid carrying items up and downstairs.
- Use a lightweight vacuum cleaner if possible.
- Try to maintain tidiness in your home; it can be frustrating and depressing to live in clutter. Liaise with charitable services – Age UK/Red Cross/family or private companies – to request support if required.
- Ask for assistance with heavy tasks if possible (changing the duvet cover / hoovering/ moving items up/down stairs) – consider sliding them across work surfaces if it is safe to do so.
- Do not use aerosol products around the home and avoid cleaning products that vaporize into the air.
- Ensure you have good ventilation and a supply of fresh air during activities.
- Damp dusting reduces the amount of dust stirred into the air, but if it is particularly dusty, wear a mask as a precaution.
- Use smaller rubbish bags to avoid having to lift/carry heavy bags and empty them more frequently.
- Let dishes soak in soapy water to eliminate the need to scrub cooked on food, and after washing up, let cups and plates drip dry.
- Use fabric conditioner to reduce creasing.
- Avoid 'pegging out' in times of extreme weather. Use a 'maiden' or rotary line to avoid unnecessary reaching.



Position the rubbish bin near the front or back door for easy access.

- For smaller items, consider using a circular washing holder to reduce the number of times you are reaching up to the washing line.
- Adjust the ironing board to waist height when either sitting or standing.
- Eliminate items that do not need ironing.
- It is easier to sit on a small stool or kneel to load/unload the washing machine. Remember, wet washing is heavier than dry clothing.



Domestic tasks equipment recommendations:

- Use a long-handled grabber/equipment to assist you in picking things up from different locations (e.g. washing machine/tumble drier).
- Try creating a weekly housework plan – do not complete all tasks in one day.
- Use a high stool to perch on if you are unable to sit to iron.

Gardening:

- Use a shallow garden trug to transport tools round the garden.
- Break down tasks into stages to make it more manageable.



Shopping:

- Plan your route to travel to and explore the shops – make a menu planner/shopping list for when you arrive.
- Organise your shopping list by aisles to reduce how far you walk.
- Seek support from friends, neighbours or relatives to help with larger/heavier items.
- Ask for assistance from staff to reach up/down to items; they are there to help!

- Do not carry all the weight in one hand; distribute the weight evenly between two bags or use a waist height trolley.
- Pack perishable and non-perishable foods separately so that non-perishable foods can be left in the car and collected after resting.

Shop online and arrange for supermarkets to deliver your shopping – request for them to bring your bags into the kitchen.

Shopping equipment recommendations:

- Use light weight equipment and long-handled gadgets to reduce bending.
- A folding stool or kneeler can be helpful.

Stairs:

- Use the bannister or hand rail if you have one.
- Ascend one step at a time if you find the stairs difficult.
- Break it down into stages; for example, climb 5 stairs then rest for 30 seconds, repeat until you have ascended.

Take charge of your journey – empower yourself every step of the way!

Every breath counts and so does how you spend your energy.

By pacing yourself, planning ahead, and making smart choices, you're not giving in to your condition – you're taking control of it.

Be mindful of negative thoughts on challenging days. Remember to record, reflect and reward your progress and achievements.

Energy conservation isn't about doing less, it's about doing more of what matters, with the energy you have.

One step, one breath at a time!



To find out more about our Trust visit
www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Holly Niven, RBFT Occupational Therapist, 2026

Reviewed: June 2026

Next review due: June 2028