

# Activity education

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Household chores are a part of everyday life. The handout describes how you can try new approaches to help get the chores done.

## Basic principles

- When possible delegate: have someone do the chore for you
- Ask for help
- Plan your activity before you do it
- Pace yourself
- Modify
- Listen to your body
- Adjust expectations
- Be aware of body mechanics
- Use a schedule
- Let the tool do the work, choose tools wisely
- Remember almost anything when it comes to household chores can wait!
- You feeling better is more important than the dusting being done!
- Respect yourself the way you respect others
- Accept the need to change



## Body mechanics

- Keep the load close
- Use larger rather than smaller muscles
- Avoid working in awkward positions
- Take the time to set up the task properly. The extra few moments of preparation can really help!
- Keep back straight raise leg if needed as you bend and reach (see diagram above).



## Activity analysis

Learning to live with chronic pain often means having to change the way that you do things, or the way things get done. Doing things the way you did them before doesn't work anymore, because it causes you to have more pain. The activity itself, or the way the activity is done will have to be changed.

There are 3 main things that you need to consider when making decisions about such changes. They are:

### Ask yourself

Can something be changed in the way I do the task?

Examples: Take more breaks, do the activity at a slower pace; change your body position — sit instead of stand.

### The activity

- Is there a way I can do the activity differently?
- Can I use a different strategy to complete the task itself?
- Can the activity be broken into smaller steps?
- Does the activity have to be done as often as I did it before?

### The environment

- Can work heights be adjusted?
- Is there proper lighting?

- Could a change in environment make the task easier?

**Example:** Raising your washer and dryer on a wooden base so that you do not have to bend over as far to pick your laundry.

- Could something in the environment be removed to make the task easier?

**Example:** Packing knickknacks away that are a bother to dust all the time.

## Having a bad day?

On a bad day, you may jump to a hasty conclusion that the new approach does not work. You may have tried it only once. Try things enough times so you get a true picture of success or failure. You may find that part of the new approach works better than the entire approach, and you may need to make further adjustments.

Example: Three weeks later, is pacing working out OK? Could it be done differently, or do you need to consider another way?



This approach to problem-solving can be applied to most problems or difficulties you run into. It may seem like extra effort and time at first, but you will find that using **brain power** will help conserve energy.



## Specific chore strategies

When returning to household chores plan activity before you do it. Pace out the activity and modify the movements. If something is difficult, ask yourself “How can I make this easier?”

Here are some tips that might help make things easier.

### Vacuuming

- Hold the vacuum upright close to your body.
- Place it in the centre or the right side of your body.
- Move your body with the vacuum and reduce the movement of the whole body.
- Vacuum in strips — like cutting grass or around the room like a “Zamboni”.
- Pace out the room that you are going to vacuum.

### Example — When vacuuming the living room:

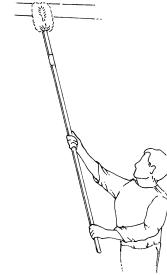
- Divide in sections.
- Do one section stop and stretch, take a break before moving on to the next section.
- Divide rooms before moving on to the next room. Create a schedule.
- Know your limits.

## Sweeping and washing floors

- When sweeping use the same technique as if vacuuming.
- Use the body to move the broom sliding from one side to the other side, walk with the broom, handle stays steady.
- Sweep in sections.
- Use a long-handled dustpan. Research other tools that might make this easier for you.

## Dusting

- Use a long handled duster if needing to reach.
- Move along wall.
- When dusting base boards, walls or ceilings, keep your head in neutral. You do not need to look up or down  
When dusting the walls, use your “feel” to guide you and glance every so often.



## Bathtub

- Use a mop to clean your tub or shower: you might want to label the mop so it is used just for this purpose
- Use a long handled toilet brush.
- Stand in tub or shower to clean. Wipe down after every use to reduce build up.
- Take stretch breaks.
- Pace out: clean one item every time you use the bathroom throughout the day. By the time you go to bed at night your bathroom will be clean.
- Sit on stool to clean toilet or tub.

## Cooking

- Use smaller pots for lifting off the stove and into the oven.
- Use a stool near the oven.
- Sit down at the table to prepare foods or change from sitting to standing throughout prepping and cooking.
- Use a timer to remind yourself to take breaks.



## Dishes

- Use a stool.
- Put a wash tub upside down in the sink and another one on the top to raise the sink level.
- Open cupboard below, place your foot on bottom shelf, change positions to decrease the demand on the body and to relax your back.
- Pace by time and number of dishes.
- Communicate your plan to those living with you.
- Wash dishes as you use them to avoid a large quantity being required to be washed all at once.

## Cupboards and fridge

Organize dishes and food that you use often on the shelves that are in your comfort zone. You want to reduce bending and reaching where possible.

- Use a step stool for higher shelves.
- Ask for help.
- Keep well organized.



**Breaks don't always have to mean do nothing. You may just need to change the activity you are doing so that you change the demands on your body.**