



Patient Information

Energy Conservation



We all get worn out from time to time, but fatigue secondary to disability or ageing can really interfere with your ability to function independently.

If you find that fatigue is impacting on your life, energy conservation techniques may help you.

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation is a technique that allows a person to perform activities of daily living tasks using the least amount of energy possible. By using less energy you will become less tired and then can participate in other activities such as leisure pursuits and social activities.

Energy Conservation techniques can be used for short term or the long term. Either way it's important to become aware of basic principles so that you can apply them to your daily routine, keeping in mind that not all techniques will work for you.

General Principles for Energy Conservation

1. Think and Plan Ahead
2. Eliminate unnecessary effort
3. Organise your work area
4. Correct Posture and Movement
5. Rest, Relaxation and recreation

1. Think and plan ahead

- Plan your time to ensure that tasks are distributed equally throughout the day and the week
- Work in a logical order – make lists and use the work simplification techniques you have learned
- Establish good work habits
- Prepare tasks ahead of time if possible, and allow yourself plenty of time so that you avoid rushing. Rushing affects you physically and mentally/ emotionally and drains your energy.
- Do not work as hard on hot or humid days, your body is already working to keep you cool
- Decrease crisis management

2. Eliminate unnecessary effort

For every person there is a balance between the amount of work you can do and the amount of rest you require in order to perform your necessary daily tasks.

To work out this balance, listen to what your body is telling you. Ask yourself these questions:

- Why am I doing the task?
- Does it have to be done?
- Can it wait?
- Can I get someone else to do it?

3. Organise your work area

- Reaching above your head or below your waist uses excess energy
- Frequently used items should be arranged close by or on shelves between shoulder and hip height
- If items are used daily consider leaving them on the bench e.g. Kettle or toaster

4. Correct Posture and Movements

Posture and movement play an important role in energy conservation techniques. By using correct body mechanics, there is a better alignment of the body and less strain on your muscles and joints, which can help to reduce the chances of becoming fatigued.

Make sure your work area is at an appropriate height for you. Avoid constant work with your arms unsupported or in an extended position. You can consult an Occupational therapist if you require assistance with designing your work areas.

Sit in chairs with a firm seat and armrests. This is easier than struggling out of a soft, low lounge chair.

5. Leave time for rest and relaxation

- Have regular rest periods
- Avoid situations that cause stress
- Learn how to control stress via relaxation

Proper Posture

1. When sitting down to rest, lean your body forward slightly. Relax your shoulders while keeping your hands on both thighs and rest your feet comfortably on floor. This posture facilitates diaphragmatic breathing
2. Raising your arms too high for prolonged period of time while working is energy consuming. Avoid this posture by lowering the height of working table to the appropriate level
3. Stooping or crouching will impede breathing. Avoid this posture by raising the working table to an appropriate height
4. Avoid bending over while retrieving objects from the floor. Before lifting, try keeping your body straight by bending your hips and knees. Then straightening your legs will assist lifting up objects
5. Keep the heavy objects close to your body while lifting and carrying

Coordinating Breathing with Body Movements

1. Basic technique:

Control the breathing rhythm. Slowly inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. The duration of exhalation should be double that of inhalation, e.g. for 2 seconds for inhalation, allow 4 to 6 seconds for exhalation

2. Adjust speed and posture of your body to get into the rhythm of breathing:

Breathe in when stretching out your arms and expanding your chest, e.g. straightening up the trunk or reaching up with the arms. Breathe out when moving in opposite direction, e.g. crouching or moving arms back towards body

3. Coordinate breathing with body movements:

Learn to coordinate the exhalation phase of breathing for the exertional movements of the activity. Breathe in when preparing for exertion; breathe out when delivering a force

Conserving energy during daily living tasks

By looking at changing the way we do things that need doing, we can save energy to do the things we enjoy doing

1. Showering – sit down for washing and drying

- Use a chair or stool with armrest in and out of the shower
- If showering over a bath specially designed bath seats and boards are recommended

Ventilate your bathroom

- Try to decrease the steam in your bathroom as this can make breathing more difficult. This can also be achieved by preheating your bathroom

Planning

- If possible, shower at night so you're not so tired during the day. Plan ahead to avoid rushing
- Ensure items (e.g soap, shampoo and conditioner) are placed in a position that avoids bending or reaching

Equipment

- Use a hand held shower and long handled sponge to reach behind your back and toes
- Use a terry towelling robe to help dry your body as it requires less energy than drying off with a towel
- Liquid soap, soap on a rope or soap in a stocking can avoid the need to bend if the soap is dropped
- Grab rails in your bathroom and shower can make you steadier when getting in and out of the shower

2. Dressing and Grooming

Sitting

- Sitting down for these activities can save energy e.g. brushing teeth, putting on make-up and dressing your lower body

Changing how you do things

- Use long handled aids to minimise bending and reaching e.g. reachers, toe wipers, shoe horns and dressing sticks
- Store frequently worn clothing in places that are easy to reach
- Plan and lay out the outfit you want to wear the night before
- Dress you bottom half first and pull underwear and pants up together
- Chose clothes that are easy to put on e.g elastic waists, Velcro fastenings, loose fit

3. Toileting

- Install an exhaust fan and ensure good ventilation in toilet
- Keep coordinated breathing during bowel open to minimize shortness of breath. Regular intake of vegetables and fruits will promote bowel movements
- Adjust height of sitting toilet or install raised toilet device to ensure appropriate height of toilet bowl

Application of energy conservation techniques – household tasks

1. Location of daily necessities

- Seasonal clothing and underwear should be kept in drawers or wardrobes nearby
- Kitchen utensils should be placed in a rack for drying. This saves energy from drying and tidying

2. Cooking

- Install an exhaust fan and a range hood to ensure good ventilation in kitchen during cooking time
- While cooking, minimize handling multi-tasks at the same time, e.g. frying vegetables and steaming fish together. It will make you tense
- Frying and stir-frying trigger fumes and smoke leading to shortness of breath
- Sit down for the preparation work, e.g. sitting down for cutting vegetables, peeling and marinating food
- Place a chair inside or outside kitchen for intermittent rests

3. Laundry

- Use the washing machine and drying machine
- Avoid squatting down to do laundry by hand. Sit whenever possible
- If the laundry is too heavy, handle a part of the load at one time
- When hanging clothes out to dry, sit down and perform the actions slowly. Practice coordinated breathing during hanging clothes out to dry

4. Home cleaning

- Seek help for heavy household tasks
- Sit in front of the cupboard when cleaning the bottom part of the cupboard. Use coordinated breathing technique when bending at trunk
- Schedule housework evenly with one task every day in order to avoid exhausting yourself, e.g. laundry on Mondays, sweeping floor on Tuesdays, cleaning on Wednesdays, etc
- Wear masks and use a vacuum cleaner for dusting at home

Application of energy conservation techniques – outdoor and leisure activities

1. Eating out:

- Plan the route, the time involved with consideration of the location (any stairs or slope) beforehand. Match the demand with your own physical abilities and tolerance

2. Strolling in the garden in the morning:

- In summertime, it will be more comfortable to arrange strolling in the garden at about five to six o'clock in the morning to avoid the heat. During winter, arrange to have walks at around eight to nine o'clock in the morning with sunny and warm temperature. Put on clothing with higher collar or use scarf to keep yourself warm

3. Shopping:

- Plan the route for shopping to avoid getting exhausted.
- Seek help from relatives/friends for heavy groceries or buy only one heavy load every day
- Arrange delivery service for heavy groceries
- Use shopping bags to carry over shoulders or use trolley for shopping

4. Attend medical follow-up:

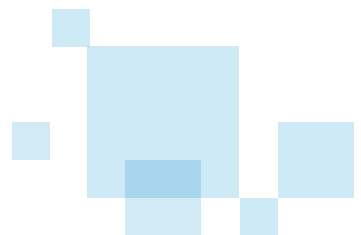
- Arrive at the location of medical follow-up in time
- Apply non-emergency ambulance transportation services via nurses whenever necessary
- Seek for assistance from oxygen vending agents or occupational therapists for arrangement/information of transportation for oxygen users
- Buy or loan of wheelchair if one feels difficult to manage the trip

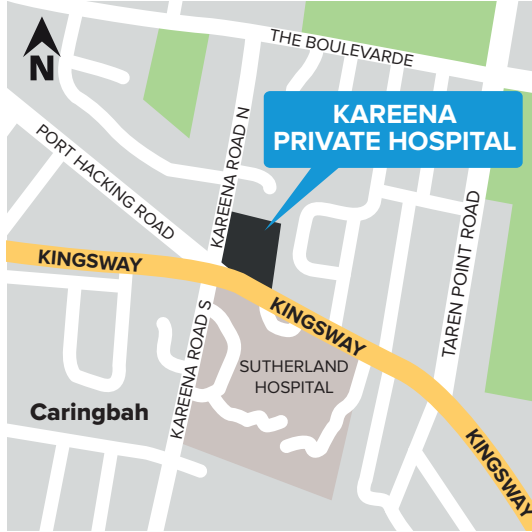
5. Long tour trip:

- Bring along adequate medication with additional dosage for emergency situations
- Avoid getting exhausted by planning intermittent rests for the trip
- Prepare medical reports and medication lists for emergency use
- Use a trolley to carry luggage or ask relatives to help

Conclusion

This booklet introduces some general techniques and principles of energy conservation for patients. It only serves as a general reference for application in activities of daily living. For those who have enquires or change of medical condition, they should contact their relevant occupational therapists for assistance.





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People caring for people.