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The Role of Activity

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THE ROLE OF ACTIVITY

We have already discussed how both depression and anxiety can lead to a repetitive pattern of rest and activity dependant on how you feel. This pattern is generally very hard to break out of and can be very frustrating. You may find that you tend to do too much on good days, rendering yourself inactive on other days, due to worsening symptoms.

This information sheet discusses ways to help you to break out of this vicious circle.

In this section we will look at:

- 1. Activity and rest**
- 2. The role of activity in breaking the cycle of depression**
- 3. Planning a programme of scheduled activity and rest**
- 4. Increasing your activity levels**
 - **Establishing a baseline**
 - **Developing and activity schedule**
 - **Reviewing your activity schedule**
- 5. Activity Diary**
 - **Example of an activity baseline**
 - **Example of an activity schedule**
 - **Blank activity schedule**

Activity and Rest

We all need adequate rest to be healthy. Sufferers of both depression and anxiety often find that they have to rest more than before, but rarely find it refreshing. This may be due to the following.

1. Your body does not get a chance to get used to a regular routine, as you're probably resting in response to your symptoms of depression and anxiety.
2. Although you probably feel that you need more rest, too much rest can be counter-productive. Excessive rest can make you feel more tired and lacking in energy, and impairs the quality of your sleep at night. Your physical fitness and muscle strength will reduce and lethargy will increase.

In addition to your rest being inconsistent and un-refreshing, your activity levels are also likely to fluctuate. Repeated experiences of bursts of activity that make you feel worse, are likely to make you think that it is simply not possible to become more active.

The Role Of Activity In Breaking The Cycle Of Depression

As we have already discussed (see What is anxiety and depression), general activity, reduced social contact, reduced level of structure as well as the planning and achievement of goal directed behaviours serve to reinforce depression symptoms. When we are depressed these are common behaviours that we adopt. As such, to assist in the breaking of the cycle of depression and anxiety, it is important to focus on planning activity into your schedule.

Initially, when you start to increase your activity levels you can expect your fatigue and other symptoms to increase. However, this is usually only temporary and it is important that you maintain your activity programme. Your symptoms should gradually decrease, although this may take a few days or weeks.

Planning A Programme Of Scheduled Activity And Rest

The key to becoming more active is to make activity and rest consistent, regardless of how you feel. It is important that you plan small chunks of activity at regular intervals, rather than long periods of occasional activity. As you increase your level of everyday activities you will gradually become stronger, and will be able to cut down on excessive rest.

It is important to plan in advance what you are going to do each day, by creating an activity programme each week. You should try to plan to do about the same amount of activity, and have the same number of rests each day. This may be difficult due to practical restraints, but you should aim for as much consistency in activity and rest as possible (Rests should be time for reading 'light' material, listening to music, watching television, but not sleeping).

Increasing Your Activity Levels

The next step is for you to start GRADUALLY increasing your activity levels. This needs to involve the gradual increase in your levels of activity and the gradual reduction in any things you may be doing too much of (for example inactivity, resting, cat naps).

Establishing A Baseline

Consider your current levels of activity and rest using the activity diary sheet. Look at the past couple of weeks and write in the activities that you did each day.

- Write down what you did at the times allocated in your activity diary.
- Include as much detail as possible. For example, length of time of activities and rests.
- It is important that you complete your diaries for every hour of the day, however trivial the activity may appear to be at the time.
- The example of a completed activity baseline may help you with this.

This is now your baseline level of activity and we need to look at developing a plan of activity for the next week based on gradually increasing your activities and reducing your inactivity and rest periods. Note that some people are actually having too much activity and not enough rest in which case the plan may be the opposite. If you are not sure, seek assistance/advice from a qualified professional.

Developing An Activity Schedule

Increasing Your Activity

Activity can involve several different elements. Activities can be part of a task to complete, be at home or outside, be on your own or with others. They can be tasks that are necessary or those that are pleasurable. As such, when planning to increase your activity try to include a balance of these different types of activity (see the list below):

1. **General activity in the home** (*cleaning, tidying, DIY etc*)
2. **Social activity in the home** (*spending time with others at home*)
3. **General activity out of the home** (*activity away from the home that does not necessitate interaction with others*)
4. **Social activity out of the home** (*activity away from the home that includes the element of needing to interact socially with others*)
5. **Goal directed activity** (*working on completing a task, which may be a personal or work related task*)
6. **Pleasurable activities** (*activities that are hobbies or interests that you would describe as pleasurable. Remember that while you are feeling anxious or depressed you may not experience this pleasure currently*)

7. **Self care activity** (*activities that include an element of self care such as showering, having your hair cut, wearing make up, shaving etc*)
8. **Exposure activity** (*this includes any activity that you may currently avoid because of anxiety. In such cases you may need also to refer to the section on graded exposure to assist in planning a graded exposure plan for these activities*).

Based on your baseline level of activity, plan an achievable activity schedule for the following week. If you struggle with this or feel overwhelmed with a week's schedule you can start with a day or a couple of days at a time. Remember to be realistic in your plan. The amount by which you increase your activity level will depend on the activity and the length of time that you are already spending on the activity. It is important that the increase is *GRADUAL* and *SUSTAINABLE*. See the example of a completed activity schedule

A Note on Resting And Sleeping Activity

Your periods of inactivity should naturally reduce as you start to include more structured tasks and activities into your daily schedule. With respect to your rest times, it is important that you do schedule in times for rest but these should be in balance with your times of activity. Resting activities may be having a break in the garden, stopping for a cup of tea or watching TV. With respect to sleep and cat napping please see the section on managing your sleep.

Follow your plan over the next week and make a note on a regular basis of what you were and were not able to achieve.

Reviewing Your Activity Schedule

Look at the activity programme that you made yourself for the past week, and ask yourself for each different activity – How successful was I at completing it? Look at the chart below, to decide how to change your levels of activity during the next week.

% Of Success In Achieving 0% = Not Achieved 100% = Complete Achievement	Possible Reason For Achievement/Non-Achievement	How To Change Your Activity Level
0-25%	Activity Level Set Too High Set Back Occurred Possible Need To Review Medication Issues If Repeated Low Levels Of Achievement On Tasks*	Reduce The Activity Level For The Following Week
26-50%	Activity Level Set Slightly Too High	If Nearer 26% then Reduce Slightly, Otherwise Keep The Same
51-75%	Activity Level Set About Right	Keep The Activity Level The Same If Nearer 51%, Otherwise Increase The Activity Level
76-100%	Activity Level Set About Right	Increase Your Activity Level Unless You Have Reached Your Goal In Which Case Maintain This Level And May Be Work Up Your Levels In Other Areas

**In some cases the biological symptoms of anxiety/depression may make this type of behavioural work too overwhelming. If you feel this is the case it is recommended that you discuss this with your case worker/Therapist/GP to discuss the possible reasons for this and the possible role of medication to assist in bringing some of the biological symptoms down sufficiently that you can then commence this behavioural aspect of your recovery.*

A Note on Introducing New Activities

Once you have decided which of your activities you can increase for the next week, the next step is to decide whether you are able to introduce a new activity in order for you to start working towards your treatment targets.

The main guidelines that we can suggest when considering introducing new activities are as follows.

1. Overall success of the previous weeks' activity programme of at least 75%.
2. When you have completed a target.
3. If, for circumstances beyond your control, you are unable to continue a particular target.
4. When your rests have decreased (if appropriate), and you have the time for more activities.

You should continue to develop your activity planning using these guidelines on a weekly basis until you have achieved your goals and targets (see section on goals and targets).

ACTIVITY BASELINE (Example)

	Mon	Tue	Wed
9-11am	<i>In bed</i>	<i>In bed</i>	<i>In bed</i>
11am-12pm	<i>In bed</i>	<i>In bed</i>	<i>In bed</i>
12-2pm	<i>Watched TV Worried about work</i>	<i>Drank tea Snacked on junk from fridge</i>	<i>Slept on settee</i>
2-4pm	<i>Mom and dad pop round bring son home from school</i>	<i>Mom and dad pop round bring son home from school</i>	<i>Mom and dad pop round bring son home from school</i>
4-6pm	<i>Slept on settee</i>	<i>GP appointment</i>	<i>Watched TV</i>
6-8pm	<i>Sat in lounge with son</i>	<i>Went to bed felt irritable with noise son was making</i>	<i>Sat in lounge with son</i>
8-10pm	<i>Spend time with family watching TV</i>	<i>Watched TV in bed and dozed</i>	<i>Spend time with family watching TV</i>
10-12pm	<i>Stayed up watching rubbish on TV fell asleep on settee</i>	<i>Went to bed</i>	<i>Went to bed</i>

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE (Example)

	Mon	Tue	Wed
9-11am	<i>Get up, have breakfast</i>	<i>Get up, have breakfast</i>	<i>Get up, have breakfast</i>
11am-12pm	<i>Walk to corner shop and get today's paper</i>	<i>Write shopping list</i>	<i>Walk to corner shop and get today's paper</i>
12-2pm	<i>Read through paper, try and do the crossword Have lunch</i>	<i>Meet Jim for lunch in town</i>	<i>Drive to local park and have a walk</i>
2-4pm	<i>Phone my friend Jim and arrange to meet him for lunch tomorrow</i>	<i>Walk to shop on way home and get shopping in</i>	<i>Attend meeting at work</i>
4-6pm	<i>Collect son from school Spend time with son</i>	<i>Collect son from school Spend time with son</i>	<i>Collect son from school Spend time with son</i>
6-8pm	<i>Help partner with preparing evening meal</i>	<i>Take son swimming</i>	<i>Help partner with preparing evening meal</i>
8-10pm	<i>Spend time with family watching TV</i>	<i>Spend time with family watching TV</i>	<i>Go out with family to local pub for meal</i>
10-12pm	<i>Have a bath and prepare for bed</i>	<i>Get ready for bed</i>	<i>Get ready for bed</i>

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
5-7am							
7-9am							
9-11am							
11am-12pm							
12-2pm							
2-4pm							
4-6pm							
6-8pm							
8-10pm							
10-12pm							