PEM

Post Exertional Malaise (PEM)
also referred to as Post Exertional Symptom Exacerbation (PESE) and/or Post Exertional Neuroimmune Exhaustion (PENE)

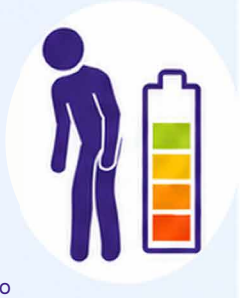
Recognising and managing PEM is essential to prevent deterioration and support recovery.

THE ME ASSOCIATION

WHAT IS PEM?

PEM is a disproportionate and profound worsening of symptoms and/or appearance of new symptoms, following physical, cognitive, emotional or sensory exertion - even minimal activity. It is usually delayed by hours or days, and recovery can take days, weeks or longer.

PEM is the hallmark symptom of ME/CFS. Research shows measurable biological changes in the body after exertion, not deconditioning. The MEA funds research into the causes of ME.



IMPORTANT: Recovery needs extra rest and time, and repeated PEM can lead to long-term loss of function and quality of life.

WHAT CAN TRIGGER PEM?

e.g. PHYSICAL
walking, exercise, housework, standing, lifting

e.g. MENTAL
concentration, problem solving, reading, screen use

e.g. EMOTIONAL
stress, upsetting events, social interactions

e.g. SENSORY
sights, sounds, smells and touch/vibration

e.g. ORTHOSTATIC STRESS
upright activity time with feet on the ground

e.g. ENVIRONMENTAL
temperature, chemical exposure, barometric pressure

Even enjoyable or necessary activities can trigger PEM

HOW PEM TYPICALLY UNFOLDS

1. **ACTIVITY**
Any activity, even minimal or everyday tasks, a return to baseline or anything beyond the person's current energy limit.

2. **DELAY**
Symptoms usually worsen 12-48 hours after activity, though this can vary.

3. **EXACERBATION**
Symptoms worsen and new ones may appear: physical, cognitive and/or emotional.

4. **DURATION**
Can last days, weeks or longer. Return to baseline is not quick or linear.

5. **RETURN TO BASELINE**
Rest and pacing support a return to baseline. Pushing through prolongs the setback.

PEM can be unpredictable, and repeated episodes can lead to long-term decline in function.

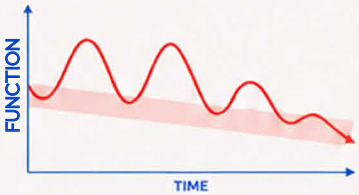
PEM SYMPTOM PRESENTATION

- Worsening of usual symptoms
- Flu-like feelings
- Brain fog and difficulty concentrating
- Muscle weakness
- Increased pain
- Headaches
- Dizziness / lightheadedness
- Nausea
- Sleep disturbance
- Sensory sensitivity
- Profound fatigue / exhaustion



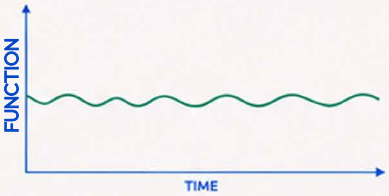
WHY PACING MATTERS

PUSHING ON / OVERDOING



Leads to more frequent and severe PEM and a decline in function over time.

PACING / STAYING WITHIN LIMITS



Helps reduce the risk of PEM and supports stability and better quality of life.

WHAT HELPS

- Pace activities within your energy limit
- Rest before you need to
- Prioritise and break tasks down
- Reduce sensory and orthostatic load
- Seek support - you don't have to do it alone
- Plan recovery time after unavoidable activity

KEY MESSAGE

PEM is a serious, often delayed reaction to exertion. Recognising it and pacing within energy limits helps prevent deterioration.

ME/CFS is a serious, multi-system condition. Understanding PEM is essential to provide better care and outcomes.

For resources and support:
www.meassociation.org.uk

Healthcare 4 ME
TRAINING - SUPPORT
HEALTHCARE TOGETHER