



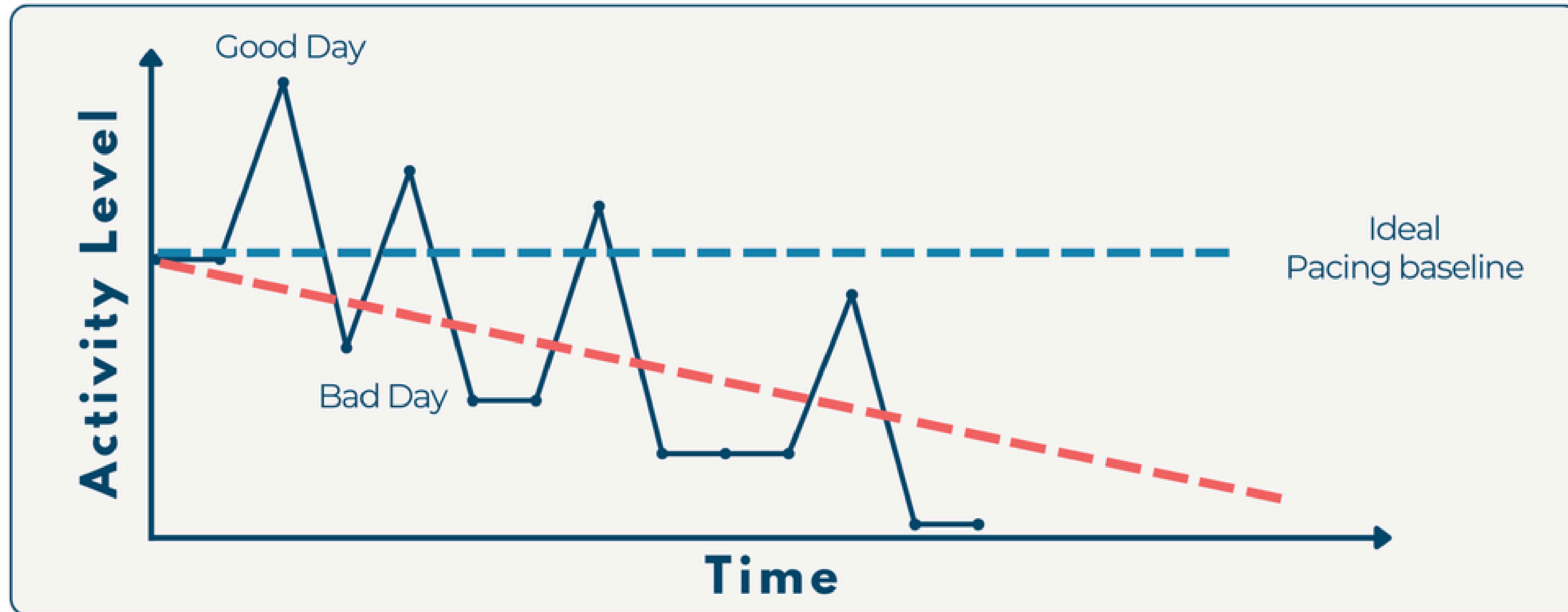
Neurodivergence and Pacing Systems

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The Boom-or-Bust Cycle

Harmony Unlocked



- 1) When we perpetually push ourselves beyond our body's limit, it takes longer to recover each time we go through the cycle, and the burnout deepens.
- 2) It tends to send our mood on a rollercoaster. We tend to feel upbeat, positive, and accomplished on our "good" days, followed by a collapsing depression, disappointment, and melancholy on our "recovery days."
- 3) Each time we go through the cycle, it takes us longer to get back to our baseline, which is how we end up in positions of chronic pain, fatigue, and burnout.



Pacing Systems (for ADHD and Autism)

Pacing systems are widely used in medical systems for people experiencing chronic pain, chronic fatigue, and other challenges related to a disability or chronic health issue. A pacing system is essentially any system that helps you sustainably monitor and manage energy. A pacing system helps you to find balanced energy management as you navigate life with a chronic illness or disability.



Pacing Systems

Harmony Unlocked

- Pacing energy helps to even out our energy expenditure so we don't get stuck in the boom-or-bust cycle
- Pacing systems help create a lifestyle that balances energy expenditure.
- Various pacing systems are available (Spoon Theory, Energy Accounting, Traffic Light System).
- The goal is to create a more sustainable life where you can feel more empowered--so you experience more agency over your everyday activities (versus feeling as if you are at the mercy of your body).
- Do an inventory to understand how much energy you're actually spending.
- During your inventory phase, you want to focus both on what takes energy and what restores energy.
- Spend a few days to a week monitoring your energy input and output so that you get a solid idea of your baseline.



Pacing Systems

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Energy Accounting System:

- Developed by Autistic advocate Maja Toudal during her teenage years
- Serves as a tool to communicate her experience of being autistic and managing limited energy resources.
- This approach is akin to balancing a checkbook.
- Each activity is assigned an energy cost (deposit and input), and you "balance your checkbook" accordingly.
- Opt for the Energy Accounting system if you lean towards a numerical approach and prefer to quantify your energy expenditure.



Pacing Systems

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Green Light-Yellow Light-Red Light System:

- Good if you're fixated on numbers or if you're color oriented and want something broad and basic to capture your activities

Red Light Activities: High-energy expenditure tasks

Yellow Light: Medium to neutral activities

Green Light: Restorative and recharging activities

- You identify your red light activities and ensure you A) space them out, B) intersperse yellow and green light activities, and C) carefully monitor the number of red light activities you engage in within a given day or week.



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Spoons Theory:

- Developed by Christine Miserandino while explaining the impact of lupus on her energy and daily tasks
- Offers an analogy for individuals with chronic illnesses or invisible disabilities.
- In this concept, you start your day with a limited number of "spoons," representing your energy units.
- Activities deplete these units, so you must consider how many "spoons" you have each day and allocate them wisely.



Pacing Systems

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Top 3 Reasons Pacing Systems Work for ADHDers and Autistic People

- 1) They turn something abstract, like "energy," into something concrete and visual. Many pacing systems rely on visual metaphors, which work well for the neurodivergent mind. Talking about "spoons" or "energy units" provides a concrete concept to anchor the conversation.
- 2) It provides language to talk with other people about our needs. Saying, "I am tired," is vague. Creating language around energy accounting or energy units helps us communicate our needs to others, which is a foundational step in self-advocacy.
- 3) It increases self-compassion: A pacing system encourages mindful check-ins. Having a pacing system in our life encourages us to check in with ourselves gently ("How am I doing right now? How much energy do I have? How much energy is this activity going to take? What do I need at this moment right now"). This sort of gentle, compassionate check fosters self-compassion.



Pacing Systems

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Set Clear Goals: Define your goals and intentions for implementing a pacing system. Are you looking to reduce burnout, manage chronic conditions, manage chronic pain, be more value-driven in your energy expenditure or enhance your overall well-being?

Create a Daily or Weekly Schedule: Based on your energy inventory and baseline, design a daily schedule that includes a balance of activities with varying energy demands. Allocate time for red light, yellow light, and green light activities, ensuring you have opportunities for rest and rejuvenation.



Pacing Systems

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Prioritize Self-Care: Incorporate self-care practices into your daily routine. Include activities that recharge you mentally, emotionally, and physically. Self-care is an essential aspect of effective energy management.

Practice Mindful Check-ins: Develop mindfulness around your energy levels. This is particularly important for neurodivergent people, as many of us struggle with interoception. So practicing regular check-ins with yourself throughout the day will help you to learn to gauge your energy reserves better. This can help you make informed decisions about when to engage in certain activities and when to rest.



Pacing Systems

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Adjust and Fine-Tune: Be open to adjusting and fine-tuning your pacing system as you gather more data and experience. Your energy levels may vary due to factors like stress, changes in routine, or health fluctuations. Flexibility and adaptability are key.

Track and Reflect: Keep a journal or record of your pacing journey. Note what activities align well with your pacing system and which ones may require adjustments. Regularly reflecting on your progress can help you refine your approach over time.

Seek Support: If needed, seek guidance from professionals, support groups, or mentors with experience with pacing systems or energy management. They can offer additional insights, advice, and encouragement on your journey.

Thank
you!