ROAD TO RECOVERY

Heart Rate Monitoring

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What is heart rate monitoring?

Heart rate monitoring involves tracking your heart rate throughout each day to get an idea of how different activities affect you. Your heart rate can give you some useful information that can help you avoid over-exerting yourself without realizing it and help prevent you from crashing.

To learn more about the push/crash cycle, click here.

How heart rate monitoring can help you conserve energy

Cells produce energy in two different ways:

1. The aerobic pathway produces energy using oxygen. It's far more efficient, and it produces a lot more energy from the fuel it is using.
2. The anaerobic pathway produces energy without oxygen. It uses up far more fuel to produce that energy.

The aerobic pathway is recommended to help conserve energy.

This is also called "staying in the aerobic zone."

How you can stay in the aerobic zone

Aerobic activity is generally lower intensity with a lower heart rate. It is more sustainable for longer durations of activity.

Anaerobic activity is higher intensity with a higher heart rate. It is meant for short bursts of activity only and typically requires rest afterwards to recover.

For each person there is a certain heart rate where the cells switch from aerobic to anaerobic energy production – this is called the **anaerobic threshold**. If you keep your heart rate below this threshold, you will stay in the aerobic zone.

This threshold can be estimated with a simple calculation.

- First, subtract your age from 220
- Then, take that number and multiply by 0.6

So, for example, if you are 46 years old, your anaerobic threshold is:

- First, 220 - 46 = 174
- Then, 174 x 0.6 = 104.4

This means that your anaerobic threshold is about 104 beats per minute. If you are 46 years old, you might want to keep your heart rate below this threshold.

Please note that this is a very conservative estimate, but it is better to start lower to ensure you are able to find an activity level that does not cause a crash.

We also know that people with long COVID are similar to those with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS) who tend to have a lower anaerobic threshold than a person without these conditions.

You may be able to adjust your threshold as you recover from long COVID and try to increase your activity. Your physical therapist can assist you with this.

Tools to help you monitor your heart rate throughout the day

Meditation and breathwork

- Meditation/relaxation exercises and breath work can help you lower your heart rate (see Breath Work section of *MyGuide* to learn more).

Fitness trackers or smart watches

- Fitness trackers and smart watches are convenient ways to check your heart rate quickly throughout the day (because you can wear them all the time). You can check your heart rate when you do various activities throughout the day (such as housework, walking, watching TV) to make sure you are staying below your anaerobic threshold.

- Be sure to adjust your activity immediately if you find yourself going over your anaerobic threshold – slow down and/or rest (see the Post-Exertional Malaise section of *MyGuide*).

Pulse oximeters

- This is another method of monitoring your heart rate. These devices can be more affordable, but they are less convenient to use than fitness trackers and smart watches – to get a reading, you may have to stop your activity to put the device on your finger, and the reading can take some time.

Tracking sheet

- This tool helps you to see how certain physical activities, your work activities, and breath work may affect your heart rate (you can download the printable tool here).

- Also, it can show you how your resting heart rate varies from day to day. Tracking your resting heart rate everyday can be helpful because a significantly higher resting heart rate one day can be a good indicator that you have already "overdone it" and you may want to rest more that day to help prevent a crash. Your resting heart rate is taken first thing in the morning before you get out of bed.

Where to next?

- Learn more about Pacing (the push/crash cycle), Breath Work, and Post-Exertional Malaise.
- Click here to download the heart rate monitoring tracking sheet.