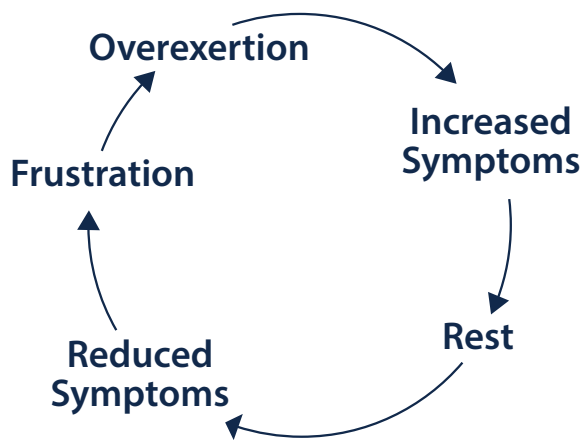


# Post-Exertional Symptom Worsening

If you feel exhausted and have an increase in symptoms after doing a minimal amount of activity, you may be experiencing post-exertional symptom worsening. This is also called **Post-Exertional Symptom Exacerbation (PESE) and Post-Exertional Malaise (PEM)**.



People with PEM often experience “**push and crash**” cycles. When your symptoms are low and you are feeling good, you push (exert yourself) to get as much done as you can. This overuses your energy reserve and your body cannot do more. This causes a crash where your symptoms get worse or you feel unable to get out of bed. You can find yourself caught in a cycle swinging between over activity and forced rest. Note that the crash can start 24-72 hours after activity and then can last for days or weeks.

**Exertion does not always mean exercise.** Exertion is defined as “anything that stresses or strains your system.” Some stressors are within your control, and some are not. Identifying triggers for PESE/PEM will help you to keep it under control. Trigger examples include:

- Physical (exercise, showering, washing dishes)
- Orthostatic (standing for long periods of time)
- Cognitive (long conversations, scholarly reading/writing, multi-tasking)
- Social (small talk, gatherings, non-verbal communication)
- Sensory (noisy environments, repetitive noises, bright or flashing lights, busy environments)
- Emotional (challenging interactions, tragic events, exciting events)
- Environmental (proximity to allergens, changes in weather, seasonal changes)

# Post-Exertional Symptom Worsening

**PESE/PEM** can be minimized with fatigue management methods, such as the 4 P's (Plan, Prioritize, Pace, Position), monitoring your Energy Budget, and performing Activity and Symptom Tracking. These techniques are described on separate handouts.

No trigger can be controlled all the time. However, keeping an activity and symptoms diary each day can help identify triggering events. By monitoring and reducing triggering events, you can substantially improve **PESE/PEM** episodes.

## Want more information/support?

1. **PESE/PEM PEM and Finding your “Energy Envelope” Handout:**  
[www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post\\_covid-19\\_Post-Exertional\\_Malaise.pdf](http://www.phsa.ca/health-info-site/Documents/post_covid-19_Post-Exertional_Malaise.pdf)
2. **Post-Exertional Symptom Exacerbation short video:**  
[longcovid.physio/post-exertional-malaise](http://longcovid.physio/post-exertional-malaise)