Using the Post-Polio Fatigue Log

A Bruno Byte from Richard L. Bruno, HD, PhD
Director, International Center for Polio Education

On the topic of Fatigue and Keeping an Activity Log

Original Post: I am once again going to extoll the value of an activity log, which was recommended to me by Dr. Bruno. It was useful to help me spot the triggers which led to fatigue, so I could avoid them.

My log began in 2008, and is still going. It just paid off big time for me. Since being PPS diagnosed (and educated) in 2008, I have been able to do light hiking. I knew it was a risk. “Conserve to preserve” was always present in my mind, but was balanced by a desire to see and explore the world around me. So, I walked that knife edge, using my legs, but monitoring and logging everything that might relate to PPS in any way, noting the triggers that caused problems and avoiding those triggers, once noted.

This winter I suspected that things were changing. Reviewing my log confirmed it. In the summer of 2014, my average hike was about 4 miles, with my longest being 8.4 miles. Last winter, my hikes with a friend were 3 to 5 miles long. In 2015, my summer hike average dropped to about 3 miles with the longest being 5.5 miles. Recently this winter, our hikes have been 2 miles, more or less. Clearly my ability to walk was dropping.

If I pushed, my log would show fatigue 2 days after the hike. I didn’t push, dropping distances as needed to avoid fatigue. Recently, something new showed up. I was experiencing some leg weakness in the later parts of a hike. As this was usually during descent, it was a little unexpected and almost indistinguishable from my legs being tired, but I noticed it because my log had warned me that things were changing, and I was being hyper-attentive. I logged the weakness. Over the past 2 weeks, my log shows an increase in frequency of leg weakness, and that I needed a longer recovery time. Hopefully, I will continue to be mobile, because I will not be pushing the issue. I will be conserving to preserve.

The lesson for me, and what I hope to share, is once again that keeping a good log is invaluable in managing PPS, in spotting problems, and in avoiding them. Whether you spend your day in a comfy chair reading a book (is any hand strain occurring?), cleaning the house, doing a little walking around the house without your braces, taking a long trip in the car that tires you, or whether you take a walk in the woods, log it, and log any problems that show up.

Keep the log, and look back periodically to look for patterns. I looked back 2 years to spot the pattern and to understand what was happening to me. Without my log, I would probably have continued hiking every other day, oblivious to the harm I was doing to my neurons. Instead, I am going to sit in my recliner and read a book that a friend gave me. It is about hiking with a dog.

Dr. Bruno’s Response: The Post-Polio Institute daily symptom log was found to be the single most effective tool to help polio survivors identify the triggers and treatment for muscle weakness, fatigue and pain. Yes, the log takes work, but it’s work worth doing! The Post-Polio Fatigue Log is available for download in the Encyclopedia of Polio and PPS.

On the topic of PPS Fatigue

Question: The most annoying aspect about fatigue is its variability. Every day is different and my reserves aren't consistent. Some days I achieve a huge amount without any subsequent fatigue. At other times a fraction of that effort will have me crashed out for days. I’ve noticed that today’s overexertion doesn't always cause tomorrows crash. My body’s reaction can be several days later or it can be an accumulation of several weeks’ worth of tiny exertions. I consciously try to listen to my body, limiting my efforts but every now & then (and increasingly), without warning my body says NOT TODAY!!

Dr. Bruno’s Response: You are actually defining the predictability of Post-Polio fatigue: ". . . today’s overexertion doesn't always cause tomorrows crash. The body's reaction can be several days later or it can be an accumulation of several weeks’ worth of tiny exertions."

And you are describing what we call the "48 Hour Rule”: Fatigue after exertion doesn’t necessarily occur the next day but commonly takes two days to reveal itself. This is why it’s so important to measure steps walked and keep a daily log of activities to see how long it takes for your PPS symptoms to show up after exertion. There are many articles about Fatigue under that topic in the Encyclopedia of Polio and PPS.