

Should I Walk Today?

Use this document to help decide if walking is appropriate based on your current PEM zone, symptoms, and recovery patterns.

Check-in Questions

- Is your body battery above 35? (Yours may be different)
- Did you wake up with fewer symptoms than the day before?
- Is your HRV stable or increasing?
- Are you in the Recharge Window or Recovery Slope PEM zone?
- Do you feel motivated but not overstimulated?

Red Flags – Avoid Walking Today If:

- Muscle or joint pain is prominent
- Your sleep score was below 55 (Yours may be different)
- REM or Deep sleep were extremely low
- You feel heavy, foggy, or weak upon waking
- HRV is erratic or declining; stress is elevated

Observation	Recommended Response
Feel emotionally better <i>during</i> or right after a walk	🟡 Log the effect, but wait 6–24 hrs to see if a crash follows
Notice clearer thinking, energy surge	🟡 Remind yourself it may not reflect real physiological capacity
Feel a delayed crash (pain, fog, fatigue)	🔴 Reduce intensity or avoid next time
Feel neutral or better 24 hrs later	🟢 Note this as a potentially safe dose of activity for future reference

🧠 Dopamine Effect

After back surgery I'd asked my doctor about getting back to running. We agreed about the psychological benefits. In this case (PEM etc), a short, low-effort walk may provide a dopamine boost that improves mood. This is only advisable during late-stage recovery or when symptoms are stable.

For some people, especially those who had a strong baseline of fitness or a history of using movement as emotional regulation, even tiny amounts of movement can spark a neurochemical lift (dopamine, endorphins, etc.). This can:

- 🌞 Temporarily improve mood
- 🧠 Sharpen focus
- 🧘 Ease muscle tension
- 💡 Create a false signal of improvement (important to monitor)

But in the context of Long COVID and PEM, that dopamine rush can be misleading. It may:

- Mask the true exertional cost
- Lead to post-activity crashes later that day or the next
- Interfere with pacing awareness by making you feel “good enough” to do more



Summary Guidance

When in doubt, skip the walk. Consider passive recovery, sunlight exposure through a window, or gentle stretching instead. Reassess later in the day.



If You Feel You *Must* Move:

Only consider a brief, flat, low-effort indoor walk (1–2 minutes) after:

- Eating and hydrating
- Lying down again for 10–15 minutes
- Doing a full body check-in and seeing HRV rise or HR drop a little more

Otherwise, your best “walk” today is to let the blood flow while reclined—ankle circles, gentle stretches, or legs-up-the-wall posture can simulate movement benefits without PEM cost.