



Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

A patient's guide



How long will you use patient controlled analgesia?

Until you are able to drink fluids and take pain relief by mouth. If you are unhappy using PCA, alternatives are available.

Is patient controlled analgesia safe?

Yes, it is a safe technique providing you are the only person to press the button, as only you know when you need pain relief. Remember, the machine is pre-set to be safe for everyone. Some patients will need more pain relief, and some will need less. Everybody experiences pain differently.

If you are in pain do not hesitate to tell the ward staff.

They will contact a doctor or nurse from the Pain Team to come and see you. The team members are experts in controlling pain.

Maintenance

The pumps are checked on a daily basis by the Pain Team and are serviced regularly.

What are the risks?

These pumps have been in use in UK hospitals for many years and are very safe. There is a potential risk of user error or pump malfunction but safety features and regular servicing make this highly unlikely.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or

whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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This information is about patient controlled analgesia. It explains what it is, how to use it and what benefits and side effects there may be.

Analgesia means pain relief and patient controlled analgesia (PCA) is a system that allows you to give yourself small quantities of pain relieving medicines.

Some pain after surgery is to be expected, but you will recover more quickly if your pain is controlled. For example being able to cough and move about in relative comfort will help your successful recovery. Pain may slow your recovery, so do not suffer in silence.

How does it work?

The PCA pump is connected to a drip, a needle and fine tube inserted in your arm after the operation.

It consists of a machine that is fixed to a stand by your bed. The pain relieving medicine is stored and locked inside the machine. You will be given a hand held button with a light to press when you feel pain.

When pressed a small dose of the drug will go into your bloodstream the light will go out and the machine will emit a beep. The drug will start to work within minutes. This allows you have pain relief without having to ask the nurse.



Is there any danger of an overdose?

No, the machine will only allow you one dose every five minutes. This allows time for the drug to work. If you are unable to press the button because you are sleepy the machine will not automatically deliver the drug if not needed.

If you press before the five minutes are up, the machine will not beep and not give you a dose.

Beeps

Sometimes the machine will carry on beeping. This alerts the nurse to check it, usually because the morphine has run out.

Recommended way of using your PCA

- Some patients wait until they have pain and press the button.
- Some press the button a few minutes before they want to move.
- Others will press regularly to keep the pain away.
- You may have to press several times to feel comfortable.
- Remember that the effect of the painkiller will wear off.
- You will need to keep giving yourself doses to remain comfortable.

Can you get addicted?

No if used appropriately and safely. However if there are factors in your personal history this may be a concern to you so please discuss with the pain team.

What are the side effects?

The following general side effects can happen:

- tiredness
- sickness
- vomiting
- light headedness
- slowed down breathing,
- itchiness
- constipation

If you experience the above let your nurse or doctor know.