

Acute Pain Services, Anaesthetics

Pain relief following surgery – Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Introduction

There are various forms of pain relief following surgery. Depending on your operation and individual circumstances, the Anaesthetist may recommend you receive a Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) machine. You will receive information from your Anaesthetist before your operation about the benefits and possible complications of PCAs. Serious complications are rare. However, all painkillers can have side effects, but you will be closely monitored to ensure your safety. This leaflet explains what a PCA is and how you can use it effectively.

What is Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

PCA is a machine containing a strong painkiller (usually morphine) which is attached to your drip. This is programmed by the Anaesthetist to meet your individual requirements for pain control. The machine allows you to control the amount of painkiller you receive via a handset you press.

Why is this better than the nurse or doctor controlling the machine?

Patients vary in how much painkiller they need. The PCA machine allows you to give yourself the right amount for you.

How does it work?

When you need painkiller, you press the button on the handset. This is connected to the PCA machine and you will hear a bleep to confirm that the machine is working. It will then deliver painkiller into your drip. This acts quickly and avoids the need for painful injections.

Does the machine always give painkiller when I press the button?

No. It only allows you to receive painkiller every few minutes (usually every five minutes), however many times you press the button. This is to ensure that one dose has had time to take effect before another dose is given and also to minimise side effects.

Can I give myself too much painkiller?

The machine only allows you to receive painkiller every few minutes. You will be regularly observed by qualified nursing staff while you are using the PCA. They will be closely monitoring you for any side effects. It is important that

only you press the button (not relatives or friends) and only for pain from your operation site.

Will I get addicted?

No. Addiction does not happen when you are taking painkillers via a PCA for a few days to treat pain from an operation, no matter how much pain killer you need.

How often should I press the button?

As often as you need to keep yourself comfortable. You should use as much painkiller as necessary, so that you can move around comfortably.

Are there any side effects?

Occasionally people feel sick, sleepy or itchy. If you experience any of these side effects please tell your nurse as treatments to relieve these symptoms are available.

What if I can't press the button?

You will be assessed when the PCA machine is set up to ensure that you are able to use it. The handset can be adapted for people unable to press the button. If this is not possible, the PCA handset can be controlled by the nurse looking after you.

What if the PCA is not controlling my pain?

Qualified nurses will be assessing you regularly to ensure that your pain is well controlled. They will be able to advise you how to use the PCA effectively. If you are still experiencing uncontrolled pain, the nurses will contact the Acute Pain Service who can provide additional support and advice.

Further Questions

If you have any concerns or further questions about your PCA or your pain relief please speak to the nurse looking after you.

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This information can be made available in larger print, other formats and languages on request. Please contact 0191 233 6161 extension 27740.

Arabic:

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Czech

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Farsi Persian:

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French:

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Polish:

Na życzenie niniejsze informacje mogą być udostępnione w wersji z dużym drukiem oraz w innych formatach i językach. Prosimy o kontakt pod numerem 0191 233 6161 wew. 27740.

Portuguese:

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Urdu:

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