

Information for patients and carers

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of three overlapping, wavy bands of blue color, transitioning from a lighter blue at the top to a darker blue at the bottom.

What is Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) involves a device which allows you to control the amount of pain medication you receive.

What are the advantages of PCA?

The main advantage is that you can control when you have the medication and so will not have to wait for a nurse to prepare a pain medication for you. The pain medication is usually an opioid such as morphine or oxycodone which is given through a cannula in your arm. In general, experience has shown that patients using a PCA will need smaller amounts of pain medication to control their pain, have better pain control and experience fewer side effects. Patient satisfaction is higher with a PCA compared with other methods.

How does the PCA work?

You will be connected to a PCA device via an intravenous line. The PCA device will contain a supply of morphine or oxycodone. When you begin to feel pain, you can press the red button on the PCA handset, which is connected to the device. For safety reasons no one else is allowed to press the button for you for safety reasons.

The handset will beep to confirm you have pressed the button and then will flash for a 5-minute safety lockout time. The PCA will deliver a small dose of pain medication (opioid). The PCA machine allows you to control your pain and discomfort.

Does the machine always give pain medication when I press the button?

No. The machine is programmed only to allow a dose every five minutes or longer and has a safety lockout between each dose. If the handset is pressed during the safety lockout (whilst the handset is flashing) no dose will be given.

When will I start using the PCA?

Following surgery, you will be able to start using the PCA when you wake up from your operation. The machine will be set up ready for you in the recovery area of theatre (or occasionally on the ward). The PCA machine will go with you to the ward area.

If you have had an accident and have a lot of pain, a PCA may be set up for you.

How often should I press the button?

People vary enormously and there is no simple answer. You should aim to use the PCA to keep yourself comfortable with minimal side effects. You should not wait for pain to become too strong before pressing the button.

You should use the PCA to be able to:

- Move around the bed comfortably
- Take deep breaths and be able to cough
- Go for a short walk on your ward

People vary enormously. No comparisons should be made as to how much pain medication is needed between patients. Research has shown that good pain relief helps you recover quicker after your operation. As you recover your pain relief needs will alter.

Can my relative or friend press the PCA for me?

No. Friends and family must not press the button for you. This can be very dangerous and cause you to have too much pain medication which could have unwanted and harmful side effects.

Will the nurses still check on me regularly?

Yes. The nurses will want to find out how effective the PCA is for you and monitor for potential side effects. At regular intervals they will assess you and ask how comfortable you feel. A member of the pain team may visit you, where required.

Can I leave the ward with a PCA?

Patients may only leave the ward with a PCA if accompanied by a member of the nursing staff e.g. to be taken down for Xray or medical intervention. It is not clinically safe for patients to leave the ward area unaccompanied whilst connected to a PCA. The PCA will be stopped and not restarted if a patient chooses to go off the ward area.

Will I become addicted?

No. Addiction is not a problem when you are taking pain medications for a few days only in order to treat pain after an operation.

What are the likely side effects to the pain medication?

The opioid pain medication used in the PCA may make you feel sick, sleepy, slow your breathing, or occasionally itchy. If any of these occur let the nurses know as such symptoms can be treated and controlled.

Can I overdose myself?

Patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) has built – in safety features that protect you from giving yourself too large a dose or too many doses. The device is programmed so that you can only receive one dose every five minutes when you press the button. Each individual dose is too small to cause an overdose. The drug may make you feel drowsy, and you will fall asleep if too much is taken. When you are sleeping you will not be pressing the button, therefore you will not be receiving any more medication, and the medication will wear off. **It is important that no one else presses the button.** If this occurs you are more likely to receive too much pain medication and be at risk of overdose causing you harm.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please ask your ward nurses, pharmacist, doctors or the inpatient pain team-who will be able to give you further information about your pain relief.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/veteran-aware

<https://bepartofresearch.nihr.ac.uk/>

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www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

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This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.**

Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

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