

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Patient & Family Information

This pamphlet will tell you about a way you can control the medicine you take to relieve your pain after surgery. Please ask us any questions you may have.

What is PCA?

Patient
Controlled
Analgesia

and is a way for you to control the medicine (drug) you take to relieve your pain after surgery. The medicine you take will be given to you by a pump.

Analgesia means the relief of pain.

Why use a PCA pump?

- the pump gives you the control
- pain felt after surgery will not be the same for everyone, and by using the PCA pump you can give yourself what you need
- it is safe and easy
- patients with good pain control tend to move around more easily and recover more quickly

How does PCA work?

- the doctor orders the type and dose of the medicine you will receive
- the PCA pump is on the intravenous (IV) pole, and gives you the medicine through your IV tubing
- when you feel pain you press a hand held button to deliver the medicine
- the pump will beep to let you know it is doing what you asked
- as well, you can give yourself medicine before you do something that will cause you discomfort (such as getting out of bed)

How often should you press the button?

- press the button when you have pain
- after a dose, the pump will not let you take another dose until a preset number of minutes have passed. This gives the drug time to relieve your pain before using more. It also protects you from giving yourself another dose too soon.

As the medicine may make you drowsy **take it for pain only**. If you feel too drowsy **do not** push the button. Most patients want to be comfortable without being too drowsy. **Tell the nurses if you aren't getting good pain relief.**

How long will you be on the pump?

Most people stay on the pump until they are able to change over to pills, usually in about two days.

How is PCA better than other injections?

- you do not have to wait for a nurse to prepare the injection (needle) as you give yourself the medicine right away
- medicine given through an IV is fast acting, you will get pain relief more quickly
- although the doses are smaller, you can have the medicine more often
- a bonus . . . you will not have injections

Common concerns:

Is it safe?

Yes, PCA has been used for years.

Can you overdose yourself?

To prevent this from happening the pump does not allow you to take another dose for a pre-set number of minutes after each dose. The doctor prescribes the amount of medicine the pump can deliver.

Will you become addicted?

No. This is a common concern. Addiction happens when these drugs are taken for emotional reasons, not for pain relief. They also need to be taken for longer than a couple of days.

Are there side effects?

The same side effects may occur (drowsiness, nausea) as with injections, although they are often less as the doses are smaller.

If you use the PCA will you receive less care from the nursing staff?

No. The nurses will check on you often. If you have a concern, be sure to discuss it with them.

You are a partner with us in planning your care. Ask questions, and be sure you are clear about how you will manage when you go home.

For general information or if you have any questions and you cannot contact your doctor, please phone:

**HEALTHLink Alberta
1-800-408-5465 (LINK)
Health advice 24 hours a day**