

# Patient Controlled Analgesia

Pain management method for short-term pain relief in children and teenagers during their stay in hospital.

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) is used to help keep your child comfortable when moderate to severe pain is expected and they cannot take medicine by mouth.

## What is Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

Patient Controlled Analgesia or PCA is pain relief controlled by the patient (your child). A PCA pump is a machine which allows your child to give themselves the analgesia (pain relief medicine) when they need it.

The most common medicines used are morphine, fentanyl and oxycodone. The medicine in the PCA pump is given through a plastic tube into a vein (also called an intravenous drip or IV) when your child pushes a button.

PCA is used for children aged seven years or older as they can understand the use of the button and can press it in the right way.

This is a safe method because the PCA pump is programmed for your child's weight. The pump will not let your child give too many doses.

Your child is seen by the Acute Pain Service team every day to make sure the pain relief is working well enough and check for and treat any side effects.

## How does a PCA work?

The PCA pump has a hand set with a button for your child to press when they want to be more comfortable. When the button is pressed, the pain relief medicine is given in a set dose through the IV drip.

**To keep your child safe, it is extremely important that ONLY your child presses the PCA button.**

If your child is sleeping well then they are probably getting enough pain relief.

It may be helpful to remind your child to press the button regularly during the fifteen minutes before activities such as dressing change, moving or physiotherapy. Remember that you cannot press the button for your child.

If your child is uncomfortable, changes may be made to the PCA or to your child's other pain relief medicines. The nurse can arrange this by talking with the Acute Pain Service team or anaesthetist.

Sometimes oxygen may be needed while using a PCA. It will be given by a mask on the face or through small tubes in the nose. The nurse will arrange this.

## Why use a PCA?

The patient is often the best person to judge how comfortable they want to be how much pain relief medicine they need to make them feel better.

The good thing about having a PCA is that the pain relief medicine is available quickly.

By using the PCA, your child should be able to breathe deeply, cough, move around in bed and get out of bed without too much discomfort.

## Possible side effects of the pain relief medicine

If your child is drowsy and finding it hard to stay awake to talk to you or finish their activity, let your nurse know urgently.

Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting may be caused by the medicines, but may also be by the operation, anaesthetic or other reasons. Medicines can be given to help this.

If your child is itchy, changing the medicine may help.

Please let your nurse/midwife know if your child is bothered by any of these side effects.

These can be side effects of the pain relief medicine, not an allergy.

## What should I expect?

As your child gets better, they will become more comfortable and use their PCA less.



When they are able to eat and drink, the Acute Pain Service team will change the PCA to another medicine they can take by mouth as a liquid or tablets.

The length of time PCA is needed depends on your child, the surgery, their medical condition and how well they are eating/drinking.

#### How else can you help your child?

- Distraction can shift your child's focus from being in hospital to something enjoyable. Distraction with books, electronic games, craft or similar can help
- Guide your child's imagination to go somewhere in their mind that they enjoy or feel safe such as dancing or bike riding
- Praise your child and reinforce their ability to stay calm and cope
- Keep your words helpful and focused on getting better
- Ask your nurse for a brochure on helpful words called 'Words I can use to help my child during a procedure'

#### Care after going home

Your child may need to take pain relief medicine by mouth for the first few days until they are moving comfortably and sleeping well. If your child needs strong pain relief when they go home, your ward doctor will order them and the hospital pharmacist will give you information.

#### Key points to remember

- The PCA button can only be pressed by the patient
- PCA is safe
- Your child will be closely checked to make sure they are comfortable and safe
- Use distraction to keep your child's mind on something enjoyable
- Speak to your child's nurse or doctor if you are worried about your child's comfort

#### The Acute Pain Service

The Acute Pain Service team help to keep children comfortable in hospital. They will check your child at least daily while they are using a PCA.

#### More Information

If you have any other questions about PCA please ask your nurse, pharmacist or the Acute Pain Service team.

### For more information

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