

# Using PCA to relieve pain

---

## What is PCA?

- PCA stands for **P**atient **C**ontrolled **A**nalgesia. Analgesia is another word for pain relief. With PCA, you use an intravenous (IV) pump to give yourself medicine to control and relieve pain.
- PCA is used throughout the hospital. If you will be using PCA after surgery, a doctor or nurse will explain how to use it. You may then be asked to repeat what was said in your own words so that you feel comfortable using the PCA.
- Please ask your nurse or doctor if you have any questions about PCA or pain medicine. Your nurse will check with you often to make sure that you are comfortable and to answer your questions.
- The Acute Pain Service (APS), along with your doctors and nurses work together to make sure your pain is well controlled. The APS team can be contacted when needed.

## How does PCA work?

The PCA pump is set to give you a safe amount of pain medicine each time you press the button, so that your pain is relieved. The PCA pump has a syringe that contains pain medicine. Nurses check the syringe often to make sure it does not run out of medicine and will add a new syringe as needed.

- The pump has a long cord with a button at the end of it.
- Pushing the button, when it is green, gives you a small amount of pain medicine right away.
- Medicines such as Tylenol are used along with the PCA and can help reduce the amount of IV pain medicine you need.



**When you have pain:**

- ✓ the light must be green to get pain medicine
- ✓ the light flashes when the medicine is given

When it is too soon to have more pain medicine the light is off. If you are not sure how to use the pump call the nurse anytime.

**What type of pain medicine is used with PCA?**

Common medicines used are Morphine, Hydromorphone (Dilaudid) and Fentanyl.

**Can I give myself too much pain medicine?**

You should be awake enough to push the button and give yourself the pain medicine. With the PCA pump, you are getting only small amounts of medicine each time you press the button. It is difficult to give yourself too much.



- PCA is your pump!
- Only you should push the button.
- Family members and friends should never push the button.
- If someone other than you pushes the button, you may become too sleepy and stop breathing.

Some people have told us that they are concerned about getting addicted. It is very rare to become addicted to pain medicine when it is used in the hospital for pain relief after surgery.

Call your nurse if you are not comfortable giving yourself the medicine. There are other ways that you can get pain medicine that will work for you.

---

## How do I know when to use the PCA pump?

Before the PCA pump is started, a nurse will explain how it works. You may be asked to repeat what was said in your own words to make sure that it makes sense and that you are comfortable using the PCA.

You will be asked to rate your pain on a scale from 0 to 10.



You may be asked to give your name and birthday to make sure the medicine is not too strong for you.

Use the PCA pump to give yourself pain medicine when you feel uncomfortable. If you feel comfortable, there is no need to push the button, even when it is green.

It is important to do the things that help you heal such as deep breathing and coughing, and moving around. As you recover, you may need less medicine by IV and can take other medicine by pills. If you are drowsy, there are other ways to relieve pain. Tell your nurse how you are feeling so that we can help you.

You may feel that you have a high pain tolerance and do not want to take too much pain medicine. Too much pain can:

- ✓ be stressful for your heart
- ✓ prevent you from doing deep breathing and coughing exercises
- ✓ limit your ability to get up and walk
- ✓ prevent your immune system from working properly
- ✓ interfere with sleep during the night

We want you to have enough pain relief so that your body can heal well.

Please tell your nurse if you feel that the PCA pump is not helping or if you have too much pain. If needed, the pump settings and the medicine can be changed to provide better pain relief.

## Can I get up and walk around with PCA?

Yes, it is a good idea to walk and move around. Moving around helps you heal and helps get rid of uncomfortable gas pains. You can bring the pump with you, it has wheels. Check with your nurse before you get up and walk.

## What are some side effects of the pain medicine?

The pain medicine may make you:

- ✓ feel sleepy or too drowsy
- ✓ feel odd, 'not with it', confused, have strange dreams
- ✓ feel itchy
- ✓ feel sick to your stomach
- ✓ have a hard time passing urine
- ✓ feel constipated

If you have any of these problems, please tell your nurse. There are other ways to relieve pain.

## What happens when I go off the PCA pump?

PCA is usually stopped 1 to 2 days after it is started. Your doctor will prescribe pain medicine for you. Usually a few types of medicines are combined because they work better together for good pain relief rather than just one medicine alone.

## Going home

When you are ready to go home, you will be given a prescription for pain medicine. Your nurse will explain the pain medicine to you and may ask about your plan for pain relief when you go home. The goal should be that you are able to move around without too much discomfort.

We recommend that you take your pain medicine regularly for the first week and as prescribed by your doctor. Your need for pain medicine should be less each day. If the pain continues or gets worse, call your doctor.

Make sure that you have a list of people that you may need to help you close by. This list can include: your family, friends, surgeon, family doctor, any community services, walk in clinic or emergency services.