

As you recover they will talk to you about stopping the PCA and starting weaker painkillers by mouth or suppositories.

The pain service

This hospital has a team of doctors and nurses who specialise in the management of pain relief. They are available to give advice on your pain control after an operation. Please contact the **Pain Management Service** or telephone **020 8725 1255**, and ask for bleep number **6477** or **6159** (Monday to Friday 08.00 to 17.00 hours).

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

An information leaflet for patients and relatives

Department of Anaesthesia



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This information is about a method of giving pain killing drugs into a vein, known as Patient Controlled Analgesia. It explains what is involved, how to use it and what benefits and side effects there may be. PCA may not always be appropriate for your individual case.

Pain is a warning sign

It tells us that something is wrong and makes us visit the doctor. Pain after surgery is normal, but if left untreated it may delay your progress. For example, being able to cough and move in comfort is one of the keys to a successful recovery.

What does PCA involve?

PCA consists of a machine that is fixed to a stand by your bed. It is connected to your drip by a tube. A strong pain killer is stored inside the machine. You will be given a hand held button to press when you feel pain. When pressed a small dose of the medication will go into your bloodstream. It will start to work within minutes. This allows you to get the painkiller without having to ask the nurse. **Do not worry about getting an overdose**, the machine will only allow you one dose every few minutes. This allows time for the drug to work. Some patients are worried about giving themselves too much pain relief. When you use a lot of morphine it will relieve the pain, and you may fall asleep. While

you are asleep you will not be pressing the button for more. You will wake up when the medication wears off or when you need more pain relief.

You will need to press the button fairly hard. The machine will beep to tell you that you have pressed hard enough. If you press before the few minutes is up, the machine will still beep, but not give you a dose. Sometimes the machine will carry on beeping. This alerts the nurse to check it, (usually because the medication has run out).

You can use PCA in many different ways:

- Some patients wait until they have pain and press the button.
- Some press the button a few minutes before they want to move.
- Others will press regularly to keep the pain away.
- You may have to press several times to feel comfortable.
- Remember that the effect of the painkiller will wear off.
- You will need to keep giving yourself doses to remain comfortable.

Can you get addicted?

Many patients are worried about using strong painkillers. They are very good at relieving pain after an operation. They are safe. You will not become addicted to them.

What are the side effects of pain killing drugs?

They may include one or more of the following:

- Tiredness
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Produces vivid dreams
- Sickness
- Itchiness
- Constipation

If you are affected do tell a nurse or doctor as other medicines can be given to help with these problems. Other painkillers can be given by mouth or as a suppository, **at the same time as using the PCA; so that you can reduce the amount of strong medication you take and reduce the resulting side effects.**

If you are unhappy using PCA, alternatives are available.

Please note – occasionally you will still have pain in spite of making full use of PCA. **Remember**, the machine is pre-set to be safe for everyone.

Some patients will need more painkiller, and some will need less. Everyone's pain is different.

If you are in pain do not hesitate to tell the ward staff. They will contact a doctor or nurse from the Pain Management Service to come and see you. The team members are experts in controlling pain.