

# Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

The leaflet aims to answer your questions about using PCA to treat your pain. PCA is a method of giving pain killing drugs into a vein. PCA may not always be appropriate for your individual case. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## What is PCA?

PCA is a machine that is fixed to a stand by your bed. Morphine or a similar strong painkiller is locked inside the machine and is attached to your drip by a tube. You will be given a hand held button to press when you feel pain. When pressed a small amount of painkiller will go into your bloodstream and this will start to work within minutes. This allows you to get the medication without having to ask a nurse. **Do not worry about getting an overdose** as the machine will only allow one dose every few minutes. This allows time for the drug to work.

## How to use the PCA

You can use the 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 under control
- 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.

The handset will light up green when you can use the PCA. After you have had a dose the light will go off until you can have another dose. If you press the handset before it lights up the machine will not give you a dose. Sometimes the machine will beep; this alerts the nurse to check it (usually because the medication has run out).

Some people worry 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.

## Are there any side effects?

You may get side effects such as:

- Tiredness
- Light headedness
- Dizziness

- Vivid dreams
- Sickness
- Itchiness
- Constipation
- Urinary retention
- A reduced rate of breathing.

**If you get any side effects 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 pain killer you use and reduce the resulting side effects.

You will be closely monitored while you are on the PCA to reduce the risk of side effects.

## Can you get addicted?

Many patients are worried about using strong painkillers. Strong painkillers are very good at relieving pain after an operation, however they must be weaned at an appropriate time to avoid the risk of addiction and dependence.

## Is there anything else I need to know?

Occasionally you will still have pain in spite of making full use of the 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 your team to review your medication and in some instances a doctor or nurse from the Inpatient Pain Service will come and see you. The team members are experts in controlling pain.

## The Inpatient Pain Service

The hospital has a team of doctors and nurses who specialise in the management of pain. The team members are experts in controlling pain and may advise on your pain control whilst you are an inpatient.

If you have any questions or concerns about PCA treatment, please contact a member of the team which was looking after you in hospital on 020 8275 1255 (Monday-Friday 09:00-17:00)

---

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## **NHS Choices**

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111



**Reference:** NEU\_PCA\_01 **Published:** June 2019 **Review date:** June 2021