

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) for children and young people

**Information for
parents and carers**

This information leaflet explains what Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) is and why it might be used for your child.

A healthcare professional will explain to you and your child how to use the PCA. They will be able to answer any questions you both may have. Please make sure your child also reads the PCA information leaflet for young people.

What is Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

This is a way of giving strong pain relieving medicines (such as morphine) to your child, after a painful operation or during a painful illness whilst in hospital. The medicine will be given through a narrow tube, called a cannula, into a vein in your child's arm or hand. As the name suggests, the patient (child) is in control of the pain medicine, so they won't have to wait to ask a nurse for it. PCA is used if your child is unlikely to be able to eat and drink for a period of time.

Who can use PCA?

PCA is given to children who are old enough and able to understand that they will be in control of their own pain relieving medicine and will have to press a button to receive the medicine. Your child will also need to have the strength to physically push the button. **Only your child is allowed to press the PCA button, you cannot do this for them for safety reasons.**

How does it work?

An electronic pump will be programmed by a nurse or doctor to give your child the correct dose of pain relieving medicine when they push the PCA button. A tube from the PCA pump will be attached to the cannula.

Your child can push the PCA button when they have pain. The pump will make a 'beep' noise to let them know they have activated it. It will take about 5 minutes for the dose of medicine to work.

Your child can press the button as many times as they need, depending on how much pain they have. If it hurts more, they can press the button more frequently. If it hurts less, they do not need to press the button as often.

As well as the PCA, your child will receive regular paracetamol and possibly a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) e.g. ibuprofen, if suitable.

Is PCA safe?

The pump is programmed so that your child cannot give themselves too much pain relieving medicine. The pump has a 'lockout' period after the button has been pressed, which means another dose of pain relieving medicine cannot be given for a set amount of time.

The best way for your child to use the PCA if they are in pain is to press the button and wait about 5 minutes. If they are still in pain they can then press the button again. They can do this as many times as they need.

Morphine tends to make you sleepy, so if your child uses the PCA a lot, they may fall asleep and so won't press the PCA button. This ensures that they do not get too much pain medicine. **Only your child should press the PCA button. This is a safety requirement for a PCA pump. Do not press the PCA button for them, as this can result in your child receiving too much medicine if they are drowsy or asleep.**

If your child is in pain but they are not pressing the PCA button, you should encourage them to press it so that they can get pain relief. **Do not press the PCA button for them.**

The ward nurses will be monitoring your child while they have PCA. They will assess their pain levels, how sleepy they are, their heart rate, breathing and blood pressure.

Are there any side effects?

Morphine is a strong pain-relieving medicine and is commonly used with PCA. Side effects of morphine vary with every child, but they may experience drowsiness, nausea and vomiting, itchiness, dizziness, unusual dreams, constipation, or slow breathing. The ward nurse will monitor your child for these side effects, but if you have any concerns please tell them. The nurses can give medications to help with these side effects e.g. anti-sickness medication or laxatives.

What if the PCA is not working?

Your child's nurse will carry out regular pain assessments, to make sure the PCA is working well for them. If it is not working as well as it could, the nurse and Pain Management team will assess whether any changes need to be made to your child's pain management. If you think your child is in pain, please tell their nurse.

How long can the PCA be used for?

The PCA is usually used for between 2 to 5 days, but sometimes for longer or shorter. When the time is right, usually when your child's pain has reduced, they don't need to press the PCA button very often and they can eat and drink, the PCA will be stopped. Depending on your child's level of pain, they will then be given other medicines, usually by mouth.

If PCA is not suitable for your child we can use other methods of pain relief.

If you have any other questions, please speak to your child's nurse.

Notes

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

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