

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a PCA and why is it important?

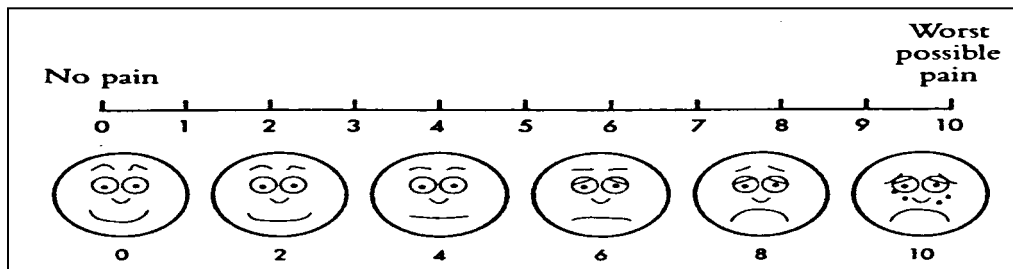
The **P**atient **C**ontrolled **A**nalgesia pump or PCA is a special computerized infusion pump that holds pain medication and delivers it through an intravenous line (IV). The pump enables you to give yourself pain medication and to control the amount of medication you receive for pain relief. Pain control helps the natural healing process, decreases anxiety, and allows for easier movement.

How does it work?

You are the key to managing your pain with the PCA pump because only you know how you really feel. The PCA allows you to adjust your medication to provide a level of comfort that is right for you. Your doctor and nurse will work closely with you. They will depend on you to describe your pain in four ways:

- What hurts?
- Where does it hurt?
- When does it hurt?
- How much does it hurt?

You will be asked to rate your pain on a scale from 0 (no pain) to 10 (the worst pain you can imagine). Your responses will help to guide the doctor and the nurse in setting the dosage of pain medication to meet your needs. The PCA may not always provide complete pain relief. It is important to notify your nurse if you are uncomfortable so that additional pain relief measures can be provided.



To activate the PCA, you will press and release a control button to deliver a dose of medication to relieve your pain. The pump will "beep" to show you that you have received the dose of medication. The nurse will teach you how to use the pump properly. **It is important that only you control the medication, and not family members or visitors. No one should push the button except you.**

How is the medication given?

There are three ways your pain medication can be delivered:

1. Through a continuous set rate.
2. Through a set rate with additional doses that you give yourself as needed.
3. Through doses that you give yourself as needed without a set continuous rate.

After each dose, the pump is set to wait several minutes before another dose can be given. This protects you from receiving too much medication. The button should only be pushed for instances of pain.

How do I get pain relief?

Use the PCA pump to keep your pain at a level you can tolerate and to maintain your comfort level goal. Do not wait too long to give yourself the pain medication. This may make your pain rise to an unbearable level and it may be more difficult to return to a comfortable state.

You should not let fear or concerns over this method of pain control keep you from using your pain medication. The best way to get the pain control that is right for you is through talking openly and honestly with your doctor and nurse about any questions or concerns you may have.

Is It Possible To Get An Overdose Of Medication?

The PCA pump is programmed so that you cannot give yourself too much medication. The nurse will set the pump's controls to deliver pain medication at the level or dose prescribed by your doctor. It is important that only the patient press the button. In rare instances respiratory depression has occurred from family members pressing the button while patients are sleeping. Do not let family members press the button.

Can PCA Cause Addiction?

Pain medications are not addictive when the medication is prescribed for a short time and then stopped gradually. People who take medicine to relieve physical pain are not likely to become addicted to medicine. Research studies have shown that patients who utilize the PCA pump actually use less pain medication. As your condition improves and your pain lessens, your doctor will change your pain medications to be taken by mouth.

What Are The Potential Side Effects of PCA Medications?

Your pain medication may cause some side effects. Please tell your nurse if you experience any nausea, constipation, itching, hives, difficulty urinating, mental confusion, or excessive sleepiness. There are treatments available to decrease the side effects.

Reference: McCaffery, M., & Pasero, C. (1999). Pain: Clinical manual (2nd ed.). Mosby, Inc.

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and
Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education Rev. 7/04, 2/05*