



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Issued by Anaesthetic Department

## Purpose

The purpose of this leaflet is to inform you about a specific method of pain relief – Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA).

Pain after surgery and injury is normal. Everyone is different and only you know how much it hurts, so never feel embarrassed to tell someone you are in pain.

## Alternatives / Other options

There are a variety of acute pain management techniques. Your anaesthetist or nurse can explain them all to you. This will help.

## Benefits

Many benefits can be gained from good pain relief including:

- You will rest more comfortably
- You will mobilise quicker
- You will resume your normal activities easier

## What is a PCA?

This is a method that allows you to control your own pain relief. A special machine, which contains a syringe of strong painkiller, is connected to an intravenous “drip” in your arm.

After your operation, you will be taken to the recovery room. When you wake up, if you have any pain, the recovery nurse will give you some strong painkiller into the drip in your arm. Once you feel more comfortable, you will have your PCA connected. If you feel any further pain, all you need to do is press down on the button on the handset. The recovery nurse will show you how. The measured dose of painkiller will be delivered straight into your bloodstream, so you may notice the effect within minutes. It is a good idea to give yourself a dose when you feel pain coming or when you are about to do something that is likely to be painful.

The drug most commonly used in this hospital is morphine as a painkiller so here are the most frequently asked questions:

## **Can I overdose?**

No, because the machine is programmed either by the anaesthetist, the recovery nurse or the Acute Pain Specialist Nurse to allow only one dose at a time. You will not be able to activate the second dose until the set time period has elapsed.

## **Can I become addicted?**

No, as PCA will only be used for a limited period of time under strict supervision.

## **Are there any side effects or risks?**

As with all drugs there may be some side effects. If you feel sick please tell the nursing staff and they can give you medication for this. Other symptoms may include feeling light headed or sleepy. Sometimes patients can feel itchy, this can also be treated with medication. Please let the nurses know if you are suffering from any of these.

## **What's the best way to use the PCA?**

To make best use of the PCA, it is advisable to press the handset about 5 minutes before moving, such as sitting up in bed, getting out of bed, deep breathing, or if you expect to cough.

It is difficult to treat pain when it is severe, so it is important to “stay on top” of your pain. When you begin to feel some discomfort, press the PCA button and then wait a few minutes to see if the dose has helped to relieve the pain. If the pain has not been relieved press the PCA button again.

## Can the drug be tampered with?

No, the syringe is locked away within the PCA machine so no one can interfere with it in any way.

## How will I know if a dose has been delivered?

Once you have pressed the button hard enough the machine will beep and a light on the handset will flash to let you know the dose is being delivered. It will stop flashing once the dose is given and the light will go off. When the light comes back on, another dose of pain relief can be given if your pain is not controlled.

## What if something goes wrong with the machine?

The machine will beep continuously if there is a fault or the drug runs out. The nursing staff will make regular checks to see that everything is running smoothly.

## Is PCA suitable for everyone?

PCA is suitable for most people. Your anaesthetist will discuss alternatives if it is unsuitable for you.

**It is important that you do not allow children or other visitors to press the handset of the PCA.**

You will be visited by a member of the Pain Services daily whilst your PCA is in progress and a plan will be made for alternative painkillers for when your PCA is discontinued.

We realise that we may not have answered all of your questions here. Please ask the medical or nursing staff if you are unhappy with your PCA or if you have any other queries about your pain management.







## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

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PIN 270/V5

Review date: July 2024

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