

Patient Controlled Analgesia or PCA

We now understand that even after the same operation, no two women are alike and that a person's experience of pain is a very individual thing. PCA is one method of pain relief that takes this into account.

What is PCA?

PCA stands for patient-controlled analgesia (analgesia is the medical term for pain relief) and is a way of giving you painkilling drugs. It consists of a pump containing a strong painkiller (usually morphine), which is connected to a tube to the back of your hand or arm.

If I decide to have PCA, what will I have to do?

When you wake up in recovery after your operation, you will be given a small button to hold.

If you're in pain, all you have to do is press and release the button, you will hear a bleep and the PCA pump will give you a small dose of morphine.

When you get back to the ward, continue to press and release the button whenever you have any pain.

They day after your operation, you might find it useful to give yourself an extra dose or two before doing something that might make you feel uncomfortable e.g. getting in and out of bed or before physiotherapy.

Remember, it's important to know that it's only you who presses the button

Could I give myself an overdose?

The pump has been programmed so that this cannot happen. You can press the button as many times as you like, but the pump will only give you a dose of morphine every 5 minutes and it will only let you have a certain amount every hour, so it's doubly safe.

Could I become addicted to it?

No, you will only need morphine for a day or two and as the pain gets better, you will use the PCA less.

Does it mean that the nurses will pay less attention to me?

No. The nurses will regularly check that you are comfortable.

Should I wait for the pain to build up before I press the button?

No. If your tummy hurts when you try to move, then that is a good sign that you should press the button. Everyone's pain is different, so press the button whenever you need to.

Will the PCA take all my pain anyway?

No, you'll still experience some discomfort and mild pain.

Will the PCA stop me getting out of bed?

No, the PCA pump is light and portable, so you can still sit out of bed.

Does the PCA mean that I won't need any other painkillers?

No. We will give you other painkillers, depending on what suits you, as well as the PCA. It's important you take these tablets regularly, especially after you've finished with the PCA.

Are there any side effects to morphine PCA?

Yes, but they are usually minor.

It can often make you feel a bit sleepy so you need to have extra oxygen whilst you have the PCA. It can sometimes make you feel itchy or a bit strange and detached.

The main side effect is feeling or being sick. If you do, please tell your nurse because we can treat this.

Do I have to have PCA?

No. There are other ways of controlling your pain, for example, injections into your leg. If you're unsure about having a PCA, the anaesthetist, ward nurse or acute pain sister will be happy to discuss it with you further.