

Can I give myself too much?

It is very unlikely that you will receive too much of the pain relieving medication. The PCA pump is programmed so that you can only receive a set amount of pain relief in a set time. The PCA pump will lock and you will not receive a further dose until the time limit has elapsed, this is usually five minutes.

How long will I need to use PCA?

This varies from patient to patient. It is usual to use the PCA for 1 – 3 days after surgery. You will then be given pain relief in another form, such as tablets or liquids

How do the nurses look after me on the ward?

If you have a PCA after your surgery the nursing staff will monitor your blood pressure, breathing and heart rate regularly. They will also ask you about you pain levels, adjust the pain infusions (drips) and give you other pain relief to help control the pain. If you are on these types of infusions you will also have regular visits from the acute pain team who will adjust and assist your surgical team to provide your pain relief.

After a few days the stronger pain relief will be replaced and there are number of different types of pain relief available in different forms. The nursing staff will continue to monitor your pain levels, how effective your pain relief is and ensure they are increased or changed if they are ineffective.

It is important to remember that it is reasonable to expect some pain after surgery and it is not always possible to be pain free all the time even if you are given strong pain killers.

What happens on Discharge?

You will be provided with a discharge advice sheet that will advise you how and when to take the pain relief you are given to take at home.

For further information visit:

www.lhch.nhs.uk
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
www.dipex.org

If you require a copy of this leaflet in any other format or language please contact us quoting the leaflet code and the language or format you require.

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Pain Relief following
Cardiac Surgery

This leaflet has been written to provide information about pain relief following cardiac surgery. We hope it answers some of the questions or concerns you may have. It is not to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

Why do we need pain relief after surgery?

We will aim to keep you as pain free and comfortable as possible following your surgery. Good pain relief is very important as this will prevent you suffering and will help you recover more quickly.

The medical and nursing staff will ask you about your pain and it is most important that you tell them if you are in pain, so you can be provided with adequate pain relieving medication.

It is normal to have some pain after your surgery and it is important to remember that everybody is different and some people need more pain relief than others. Anxiety can increase the pain people feel.

Pain relief can be altered if it is not working adequately; it can be increased, given more often, or given in different combinations.

Occasionally, pain is a warning sign that all is not well, so please let us know if you are experiencing pain. The nurse will regularly ask you if you are in pain and ask to describe the amount of pain you are in at rest and on movement

Mild = score 1
Moderate = score 2
Severe = score 3

This will help us to assess the effectiveness of your pain relief.

Good pain relief helps prevent complications

If you can breathe deeply and cough easily after your operation, you are less likely to develop a chest infection.

If you can move around freely, you are less likely to get blood clots (deep-vein thrombosis or DVT).

It is much easier to relieve pain if it is dealt with sooner rather than later before it gets a point when it is bad for you. Therefore, you should ask for help as soon as you feel pain and continue the treatment prescribed regularly.

Your anaesthetist will discuss different pain relief methods available with you before your surgery, so together you can make an informed decision about which you would prefer.

These are the different types of pain relief you may be offered when you wake up after the operation:

Paracetamol is the basis of your pain relief and this will be given 4 times a day either as tablets or given through a vein via a drip.

Dihydrocodeine or Codeine phosphate.

For the majority of patients these will be prescribed on an as needed basis. This means the nursing staff will offer them to you when they carry out the regular drug rounds. You can, also ask for them at any other time if you feel you need additional pain relief. If these drugs are not strong enough to control your pain there are other drugs you can have, so it is important that you let us know as soon as possible if you feel that you need them.

Ibuprofen is a anti-inflammatory drug and this is used with some patients. If you are given this drug it is important that you have eaten or you take food or milk with this type of medication.

All strong pain relieving drugs can make you constipated, so it is important that have a high fibre diet and mobilise when possible. Laxatives are usually prescribed if you are taking strong pain killers regularly.

Patient-controlled analgesia (PCA)

This is a method of using a machine that allows you to control your pain relief yourself. It has a pump which contains morphine. The pump is linked to a handset which has a button and when you press the button, you receive a small dose of the drug painlessly into your cannula (plastic tube). This may be used for the first 48hrs after your operation

What are the advantages of PCA?

The main advantage of using PCA is that you have the choice to relieve any pain when you feel you need it.

How do I know if PCA is suitable for me?

PCA is suitable for a wide range of patients following surgery. Your doctor or nurse will help you decide if PCA is appropriate for you. You will need to be able to press a hand held button attached to the PCA pump.

When will I start using PCA?

When you wake up after your surgery a member of staff will be with you. You will be given the hand held button and be informed how to use it.

How often should I press the button?

There are no set rules as to how often you should press the button. The PCA pump is programmed to deliver a measured amount of the medication each time. You should not wait for pain to build up before you press the button as this may result in the pain relieving medication not being as effective.