

Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital



NHS Trust

Information For Patients

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)



Liverpool Heart and Chest Hospital NHS Trust
Thomas Drive
Liverpool
Merseyside
L14 3PE
Telephone: 0151-228 1616
www.lhch.nhs.uk

This leaflet has been written to provide information about patient controlled analgesia. We hope it answers some of the questions or concerns you may have. It is not intended to replace talking with medical or nursing staff.

What is Patient controlled analgesia?

Patient controlled analgesia (PCA) is a way of treating pain after surgery. A special pump containing pain relieving medication allows you to control the amount of pain relief you receive.

How does PCA work?

A small plastic tube is inserted into a vein, usually in the back of your hand. This is attached by a small tube to the PCA pump. You will be given a hand held button, which delivers a measured amount of the pain relieving medication into your vein each time you press it. The doctor or nurse will programme the pump to control how much pain relieving medication you receive.

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. It also means that regular injections for pain relief will not be needed.

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.

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 (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.

Are there any alternative ways of controlling pain following surgery?

Yes. Alternatively you can be given tablets to relieve pain. Any alternative options will be discussed with you prior to your operation.

Are there any risks involved with PCA?

Risks involved in using this type of pain relieving method vary between patients and will be discussed with you by an anaesthetist.

The pain relieving medication can sometimes make you feel sick. If this happens you should inform staff as you can be given medication to help relieve this.

Sometimes people feel sleepy while using PCA and it can occasionally cause their breathing to slow down. You will however be closely monitored while you are using PCA.

Who should I speak to if I am concerned?

An anaesthetist and Pain control nurse specialist will visit you while you are on the ward. This will give you the opportunity to ask questions concerning your pain relief and recovery. Alternatively you should speak to staff on the ward.

For further information visit:

www.lhch.nhs.uk

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

www.dipex.org

Or contact:

The British Heart Foundation Heart Information line on 0845 070 8070

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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