

## PAIN CONTROL WITH A PCA

### What is a PCA?

PCA stands for **P**atient **C**ontrolled **A**nalgesia. *Analgesia* means pain relief. An *analgesic* is a pain medication. PCA is a safe method for postoperative pain management. PCA works quicker than shots given with a needle because the pain medication is delivered directly into your bloodstream. Shots need extra time to be absorbed.

### What can I expect?

Patients using PCA are usually alert and comfortable. PCA medication (usually either morphine or dilaudid – di – law’ – did) is put into a machine. Tubing connects the pain medication to you through your IV (plastic tubing inserted into your vein, in your arm or hand).

You will have a PCA button that is attached to the pump. You can press the button to give yourself a dose of pain medicine when you hurt. You may also be given a small amount of pain medication continuously. 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. Then wait a few minutes to see if the dose helped relieve the pain. If the pain has not been relieved, press the PCA button again.

### How will others know if I am in pain?

Your nurses will be asking you to rate your pain on a scale of 0-10 (0 = no pain, 10 = worst pain imaginable) at least every four hours. Pain is a hard thing to measure and only you know for sure how much pain you are in. If your pain increases and/or your pain is preventing you from being able to take deep breaths, walk, or move comfortably, let your nurse know. S/he can increase the amount of pain medication you are getting. You may not be 100% pain-free, but your doctors and nurses will do everything they can to make you as comfortable as possible. While in the hospital, you will be an active participant in your recovery (you will be expected to walk, cough, take deep breaths, etc.).

### How does a PCA work?

The pump will be programmed to allow you to give yourself a set amount of pain medication that is typically safe for someone your size and age, and with your type of surgery. Every patient is different, so you may require either more or less pain medication, than the amount which you are first given.

Your nurse will be monitoring your sleeping, breathing, and pain level to make sure you are receiving the correct amount of medicine for your pain level. The amount of medicine can be increased or decreased, depending on your nurse’s assessment and your level of pain. The pump will be programmed with a safe hourly limit and safe time between doses so you cannot give yourself too much pain medicine too often.

Only you can know how much you are hurting, therefore **you are the only person who should press the PCA button.**

### What you should tell the nurse:

Itching, nausea, and constipation are all possible side effects of the medicine in the PCAs. Let your nurse know if you are experiencing any of these effects. Itching, nausea, and constipation can all be treated with medications. These side effects do not mean you are allergic to the medicine in the PCA.

**How long will I have the PCA?**

You will find as your condition improves, your pain will decrease. You will find that you need to press the PCA button less often as you improve. This is usually several days after surgery, when you are taking in fluids without nausea or vomiting.

**Will I have pain when I don't have the PCA anymore?**

It is expected that you will still have some degree of pain after the PCA is stopped.

You will have pain pills available to take as needed. Your nurses will be routinely asking you to rate your pain, and if you need pain pills.

You will be given oral pain pills before your PCA is stopped. You and your nurse will ensure that the pain pills are providing good pain relief before your PCA is stopped. If you are experiencing pain that is preventing you from coughing, deep breathing, walking, etc., it is important for you to let your nurse know.

*If you have any further questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.*

					<u>0-10 Pain Scale</u>							
					moderate							
					pain							
no												severe
pain												pain
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

Resources:

Acute Pain Management: Operative or Medical Procedures and Trauma. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Health Care Policy and Research Publication Number 92-0032, 1992.

McCaffery, M. & Pasero, C. (1999) Pain Clinical Manual. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Mosby, Inc., St. Louis, Missouri.

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