

# Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

**Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) allows you to give yourself controlled doses of pain medicine through an electronic pump.**

**The goal of PCA is to use short-term strong pain relief to help you get back to your normal routine as soon as possible.**

## Who can use PCA?

PCA is used for people who are recovering from surgery or serious injuries. Occasionally it may be used for people who are experiencing other types of pain.

Only the patient receiving PCA is allowed to press the PCA button. Friends and family are not allowed to press the PCA button, even if they are trying to help or think you are in pain.

## How does a PCA pump work?

Your healthcare team prescribes a pain medicine that can be given to you intravenously (into your vein). This medicine is put into a syringe that is stored in a PCA pump device. The pump is programmed to give you a dose of your pain medicine when you push a button held in your hand.

You should press the PCA button (as pictured below) when you feel pain or are about to do something that you expect will cause you pain. The pump will always check that enough time has passed since your last dose before it gives you another dose.



## What medicines can be used in a PCA pump?

The PCA pump may contain one of several strong pain medicines known as opioids. Opioids are used to relieve moderate to strong pain.

Commonly used medicines include oxycodone, morphine, and fentanyl. You may start on one medicine but later change to another, depending on your body's response. Speak to your healthcare team if you have further questions about your recommended pain medicine.

## Is it safe? Can I accidentally overdose?

The PCA pump has built-in safety features which mean your risk of overdosing on pain medicine is very low. The pump is programmed so that the total amount of medicine you can use is within a safe limit.

The hospital's pain management team will regularly review your pain levels and how well the PCA has been controlling your pain.

## How long will I be using PCA?

PCA is used for a short period of time. In most cases, your PCA will be changed to oral pain medicine when you are able to tolerate oral intake (i.e. you are back to eating and drinking).

## Can I become 'addicted' by using PCA?

Your PCA will only be used for a short period of time. Your doses are very controlled, and your treatment is reviewed regularly. Because of these reasons, it is very unlikely that you would develop a dependence or 'addiction' while using your PCA.

Using PCA as prescribed is important for your pain control, and pain control is an important part of your recovery. Please do not feel afraid to use your pain medicine if and when you need it.

## Will I experience side effects from the PCA medicine?

Many patients experience side effects from opioid medicines such as drowsiness or nausea. Sometimes these symptoms may have other causes that may not be related to your opioid medicines.

Your healthcare team can speak to you about potential side effects, and may recommend other medicines that will help you manage these.



Reviewed By  
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Consumer Advisory Group  
*Working together*

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Developed by St George Hospital  
Acute Pain Service and Pharmacy Department  
November 2021  
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