

Patient controlled analgesia

What is patient controlled analgesia?

Patient controlled analgesia (PCA) is a method of pain control that gives you, the patient, control over the pain you might experience following surgery.

How does it work?

As a patient with a PCA, you will have a computerised pump connected directly to the intravenous line (drip), which contains a bag of pain medication (analgesia) prescribed by a doctor specifically for you.

Doses of pain relieving medication can be self-administered as needed by pressing a button attached to the pump. In some cases, the pump is set to deliver a small, constant flow of pain medication as well.

When you require pain relief, just push and release the button. This will be demonstrated to you by the nurse. You will hear the pump beep and a pre-set dose of pain medication will be administered to you via the drip. Initially, you may have to push the button several times before you can get comfortable.

You may feel sleepy after administering the pain relief. Try to relax and wait until you feel discomfort before pushing the button again.

As you are the only one who can feel your level of pain or discomfort, you should be the only one to push the button. It is unsafe for your family or visitors to push it instead.

Safety

The PCA machine has been programmed with safety precautions so that you cannot give yourself more medication than has been prescribed by your doctor. There will be a pre-set waiting time between attempts to push it again, usually five minutes. This minimises the risk of over-medicating or over-dosing.

You will be closely monitored by nursing staff while you have a PCA running. It is very important that you tell the staff if you are feeling uncomfortable or if your pain is unrelieved by regular use of the PCA. If you are pressing the button frequently and still feel that your pain is not well controlled, the dosage and frequency can be reviewed by the prescribing doctor.

When PCA can be used

The PCA device can be used in a preventive manner to reduce pain from physiotherapy, dressing changes, turning and ambulation. You should use the PCA once or twice before the painful event occurs.

The average length of time for use of PCA is two to three days after surgery, or until you are able to take tablets by mouth. The PCA will be stopped after discussion with you about other prescribed pain medicine that can be taken by mouth.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact the Ward using the phone number below.