

# PCA (Patient Controlled Analgesia): Controlling pain after surgery

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## What is PCA Therapy?

Your doctor ordered a PCA machine to help you control your pain after surgery. PCA stands for “Patient Controlled Analgesia”. It means that you will be able to push a button and give yourself a small amount of pain medication instead of calling for a nurse. PCA therapy makes it possible for you to take an active part in controlling the amount of pain you feel.

## How does PCA therapy work?

Your nurse will attach a PCA machine to your IV that will deliver medication to your body. When you push the button, the pump will push a small dose of medication in your IV. Your nurse will set the pump according to your doctor’s orders. It will be set with the dose of medication and a time span between doses. For example, your pump’s program will allow you to take one dose of Morphine every 6 minutes. This means that you could take a maximum of 10 doses in an hour. Even if you press the dose button more often, you will not receive more than 10 doses of medication in an hour.



## Helpful tips for using PCA

For best pain relief follow these guidelines:

- Press the PCA button when your pain **begins** to feel worse. Keeping a constant level of pain medication in your bloodstream is essential for good pain control.
- Give yourself a dose of medication **before** activities that may cause pain such as walking, moving in bed, coughing and deep breathing.
- **Tell your nurse** if you are not getting pain relief, or if you are having side-effects such as itching, nausea, or sleepiness. Your nurse can make changes to the PCA or medicine to help reduce your side-effects.

- Make sure **you are to be the only one** pushing the PCA button. This will prevent you from getting too much medicine. You will know when you are getting a dose when you hear a “chirp” from the pump. The pump will not give you a dose before it is time, but if someone else pushes the button you may receive more doses that you need.

### **Will I become addicted to the medication in the PCA?**

When used for the right medical reason, addiction occurs in less than 1% of the time. We recommend that you use the machine as you need it to keep yourself reasonably comfortable.

### **What are pain scales?**

In order to provide good pain care, our team needs to know how much pain you are having. The amount of pain can range from just a little bit to a lot or pain. We will ask you “rate” or describe the amount of pain you are having, using a scale that best fits your needs. For example we may ask you to use a number between zero (0) and ten (10) where zero means you don’t have any pain at all and “ten” means you have so much pain, you cannot imagine it being any worse.

Pain is different for every person. You are the only one who knows exactly how you feel. PCA is a safe, effective way to help control your pain.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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