

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

May 2025

What is PCA?

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) means that you can be in control of the strong pain medicine that you may need. The PCA medicine is put through an electronic pump, which allows you to give yourself controlled doses of pain medicine through a drip in your arm. 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.

How does PCA 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 and connected to a button.

You will be given the button which you can press when you are experiencing pain. This button is connected to the pump which is programmed to give you a specific dose of the pain medicine.

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.



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.**

What medicines can be used in a PCA?

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.

Are there any side effects?

Many patients experience side effects from opioid medicines such as:

- Drowsiness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Itching
- Constipation

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.



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Consumer Participation National Standards endorsed

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

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Is a PCA safe?

How long can I use a 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 return to normal eating and drinking.

Can I be given too much medication?

The pump is programmed so that the total amount of medicine you can use is within a safe limit. The PCA pump has built-in safety features so that you are unable to give yourself too much medication.

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

Can I become 'addicted' to the medication?

It is very unlikely that you would develop a dependence or 'addiction' while using your PCA. Your PCA will only be used for a short period of time, with controlled medicine doses which are regularly reviewed.

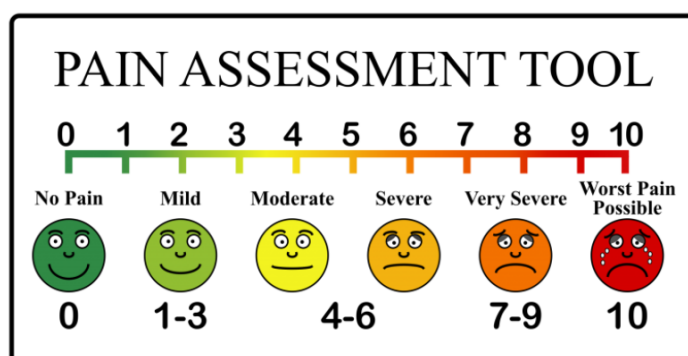
This process means the PCA is a safe way to improve your pain control, which is an important part of your recovery. Please do not feel afraid to use your pain medicine if and when you need it.



Notify your healthcare team if:

- You feel too sleepy
- You feel sick or have vomited
- Your pain is not at a manageable level
- Your skin, where the IV is placed is painful, warm, red, swollen or bleeding
- You see blood in the tube going to the pump
- Your pump has no more medicine in it
- Your pump alarm goes off

You will be regularly checked by the nurse looking after you to make sure that your pain is well managed, and you are not experiencing any unwanted side effects. The nurse may use the below pain assessment tool to help understand your level of pain.



Please understand that we aim to keep you functional and at a pain level that you can tolerate, but the PCA may not be able to completely take your pain away.