

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Child Health Patient Information Leaflet



Before Your Child's Operation

Your child's anaesthetist will discuss with you the best pain relief for your child. The options available will depend on your child's medical condition and on the type of surgery to be undertaken. Your child's anaesthetist will also explain how the hospital's pain control service works.

Who/what is the pain control service?

It's a specialist team of nurses, anaesthetists and pharmacists who help the ward nurses manage your child's pain. The team gives advice on various methods of pain relief, and in particular looks after children with Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA). The team visits these children daily to see that they are comfortable.

What is Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

This allows your child to have control over their pain. The system works by allowing your child to give him/herself extra medicine when it hurts. A special machine containing a bag of medicine (usually morphine) is attached to a

cannula, or 'drip', which is a small plastic tube into a vein. A handset is attached to the machine which is programmed to deliver a safe dose of morphine (a bolus) when the button on the handset is pressed. If your child is sore, he/she can press the button without having to ask the nurse. It takes about five to ten minutes to work, and if your child is still sore after this time he/ she can press it again. If your child is about to move or have any procedure done, it is a good idea for them to press the button about five minutes beforehand to make it less painful. **It is important that only your child presses the button. It is a safety control that if they become sleepy from pressing the button a lot, they will stop using it.**

When is PCA used?

It is used after surgery that will require strong pain relief. Giving medicines into a vein is the best way to achieve the level of pain relief needed. Also, some children are not allowed to eat or drink for a few days after their operation and so need another way to receive pain relief.

Are there any risks involved?

PCAs are set up specifically for your child according to their age and weight. Regardless of how many times the button is pressed the machine will only allow one bolus dose to be given within a certain period of time. This is called a 'lockout' and once the set time has elapsed, another bolus can be given. These features ensure that this is a very safe way of receiving morphine for pain relief.

About Morphine

Morphine is a strong painkiller and has been used successfully and safely for many years. Parents may feel nervous about the use of morphine in case of 'overdose'. The amount of morphine given to your child is carefully calculated for their age and weight. The 'lockout' feature and maximum limit programmed into the pump ensure that your child receives morphine safely. Another worry you may have is that your child may become 'addicted'. Children in pain after surgery do not become addicted to morphine. If they are on high doses for a prolonged period (i.e. a week or more) their bodies may become used to the morphine, which is managed by

reducing their dose slowly. Morphine used for pain relief rarely causes problems.

Are there any side effects?

Morphine can make some children feel sick or itchy. There are medicines your child can have to prevent this happening, and sometimes the team may reduce the morphine dose. Morphine can make some children feel drowsy and so the team may reduce it then, too.

What if my child is still in Pain?

The ward nurses will assess each hour how effective the pain relief is. As well as being given morphine your child will also be given other milder pain relief regularly, either by mouth or by suppository (in the bottom) if they are not allowed to eat or drink. Both types work on pain differently and the combination means that your child will have the best possible pain relief. If this is not keeping your child comfortable the nurse can contact the pain management team for a further review.

How long will my child need pain relief for?

Each child is different and the time for which pain relief is

needed will depend on the type of surgery they have had.

Will my child have pain when this is stopped?

Your child's medication will not be stopped until any pain your child still has can be controlled by medicines taken by mouth or by suppository.

What can I do to help my child's pain?

You can help in your child's pain management. You know your child best and so if you feel he/she is in pain, please let a nurse know. If your child has a PCA then you can encourage him/her to press the button. Encouragement may also be needed for your child to take the milder painkillers. Talking to your child can often distract them from their pain, so can fun things such as massage or play. Lots of cuddles often work wonders!

Further information can be obtained from:

NHS 111 Dial 111

Or contact your GP

Bluebell Ward,
Lister Hospital 01438 284008

Children's A&E,
Lister 01438 284333

QEII Urgent Care Centre,
WGC 01707 247549

Lister Community Children's
Nurses 01438 284012

QEII Community Children's
Nurses 01438 288370

Patient Advice and Liaison
Service 01438 285811

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www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

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