

## Remifentanil PCA

Remifentanil is a very short-acting pain-relieving drug similar to morphine, pethidine and diamorphine. Its pain-relieving effect comes on very rapidly and also wears off very quickly afterwards. A small dose of the remifentanil will be administered into a vein in your arm via a dedicated cannula when you push a button on an electronic pump; this is called **Patient-Controlled Analgesia (PCA)**

### Who can use a remifentanil PCA?

Most women in labour who are unable to have an epidural, or where insertion of an epidural is technically not possible. However, we would advise women with an allergy to morphine, pethidine or other related drugs not to use a remifentanil PCA.

### What is it like to have a remifentanil PCA?

The pain-relieving effect is usually felt 20 to 30 seconds after pressing the button and wears off again within a few minutes. You are in control, and you get the drug when you need it and not in between contractions. There is a safety feature built into the pump so that you can only get a dose every 2 minutes. You can use the pump at any time, right up to and during your delivery if you wish. The effects will wear off very quickly when you stop using the pump after your baby has been born. The dose may need adjusting at the start and as your labour progresses.

### Are there any unwanted side effects of a remifentanil PCA?

Some women can get **sleepy** between contractions, as tends to also happen with other similar drugs, such as morphine and diamorphine. However, even if you are drowsy, this will wear off very quickly after you stop using the pain relief. **This is why it is vitally important that only you press the button yourself and no-one else.**

As part of our routine observations with remifentanil, your midwife will measure your oxygen levels continuously using a sensor (like a peg) on your finger, as well as your level of pain relief and drowsiness at regular intervals. If your oxygen levels drop below a certain level, your midwife will give you oxygen via nasal prongs. Otherwise, all observations and treatments are the same as for any other woman on the labour ward.

Remifentanil has been shown to be safe for babies, with no other effects seen that don't already occur with pethidine or diamorphine. A paediatrician will be present for the birth. Other side effects can include **itchiness** and **feeling sick**.

## Are there any risks with using a remifentanil PCA?

There have been two cases of respiratory arrest (where a mother **stopped breathing**) which responded to immediate treatment. This is a rare event with a remifentanil PCA but is a very worrying occurrence. For this reason, we ensure that **you have a midwife with you at all times** and monitor your oxygen levels with a probe on your finger.

## When can I ask for a remifentanil PCA?

You can request a remifentanil PCA at any time in labour. Your midwife will contact the duty anaesthetist to organise the setting up of the pump. This may take a few minutes, but you will be able to use it immediately once you are given the button to push.

**This is an off-label use of remifentanil**

## Useful contact details

### East and North Hertfordshire Teaching NHS Trust:

- Website [www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk)
- Telephone 01438 314333

## Leaflet information

**You can request this information in a different format or another language; please speak to your doctor or nurse.**

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