

PCA

Patient-Controlled Analgesia

What is PCA?

The letters PCA mean patient-controlled analgesia. The PCA pump is a machine that quickly delivers a pre-set amount of pain medicine into your child's IV line by a push of a button. When your child feels uncomfortable and needs more pain medicine he can push the PCA button. In this way the patient controls how much pain medicine he needs.

How is the pump used?

When your child pushes the button, he receives a dose of pain medicine the medical provider determined based on his weight and medical history. The medical team can change the dose to an amount that works well for your child.

What pain medicine will my child receive?

Medicines given by PCA are opiates (pain medicine). They can be natural or synthetic drugs. Morphine is often the medicine used, but other choices are sometimes used depending on your child's medical history and condition.

How does this medicine work?

Opiates work by binding to receptor cells in the nervous system to block the pain message to the brain. Your child can press the button to give a small dose of pain medicine when he begins to hurt. He may also be given a small constant amount of pain medicine continuously by the pump. It is important that **only** your child presses the button; otherwise, too much medicine could be given. Your child's body will be the guide.

How long will my child use the PCA?

It depends on her condition. After a surgery it is common to be on PCA until she is able to take pain medicine by mouth. As your child's condition improves, her pain will decrease. You may find that she may need to press the PCA button less often when she feels better. The dose of pain medicine is gradually decreased until the pump is no longer necessary and/or your child is able to take pain medicine by mouth.

Are there side effects?

Side effects can occur with any medicine. Pain medicine can cause:

- Itching
- Nausea and vomiting
- Inability to urinate
- Drowsiness and slowed breathing
- Slowing of the bowel and constipation

The nurses will check your child often for any side effects. They will also check your child's breathing and heart rate. Medicines are ordered to help with side effects if they occur.

What is my role?

Let the nurses and doctors know if:

- Your child is hurting
- Your child itches or feels like vomiting
- Your child is too sleepy

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How will my child know when to push the PCA button?

Your child will be told how to use the PCA pump. It is important that your child knows to push the PCA button when she first begins to feel some discomfort and then to wait a few minutes to see if the dose of medicine helped to relieve the pain. If the pain is not relieved, she should press the PCA button again. If your child is unable to maintain a level of comfort that is acceptable, especially with deep breathing and walking, let the nurse know. The nurse may give a prescribed breakthrough (extra) dose of pain medicine or increase the dose on the pump.

Can my child give herself too much medicine?

The PCA pump is programmed with a safe hourly limit and safe time between doses. Your child cannot overdose by pressing the button too often. But it is **very important** that no one else (not even you!) pushes the button for your child. Let your child be the guide.

Questions?

All members of the team are here to help your child be comfortable. When a child has a PCA pump, someone from the Pain Medicine Service or the general surgeon visits daily to make sure that the amount of pain medicine is just right to keep your child comfortable. If you have questions, or would like to speak with a Pain Medicine Service team member, ask your child's nurse.

TO LEARN MORE

- Pain Medicine Services (206) 987-2704
- Your Child's Health-Care Provider

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call the Family Resource Center at (206) 987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Children's Hospital. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health-care provider.