

# PCA (Patient-Controlled Analgesia)

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We partner with you and your child to prevent and relieve pain as completely as possible.

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## What is PCA?

The letters PCA stand for patient-controlled analgesia, which means that the patient is in control of their pain medicine. The PCA pump is a machine that 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 they can push the PCA button.

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## How is the pump used?

Anytime your child begins to have pain, they may push the button. Since your child is the one with the pain, it is important that only they are allowed to push the button. The machine is programmed to give a dose (amount) of pain medicine at time points set by the medical provider based on your child's weight and medical history. The medical team will learn from how much your child pushes the button and their pain relief. Then, they can change the dose or time between doses to a program that works well for your child.

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## What pain medicine will my child receive and how does it work?

Medicines given by PCA are opiates; one example is morphine. Opiates work by blocking the pain message before it travels to the brain. The medicine usually begins to help your child feel better within 10 minutes of pressing the button.

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## How long will my child use the PCA?

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

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## 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.

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### To Learn More

- Children's Operator 206-987-2000  
Ask to speak to:

\_\_\_\_\_

(provider name)

- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.



### What is my role?

Good pain management helps your child get better faster. Pain medicines may help your child rest while healing and also make it easier to get out of bed and start moving again. You know your child best. We encourage you to take an active role in your child's recovery. 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?

Nurses and doctors will teach your child about how to use the PCA pump. It is important that your child knows to push the PCA button when they first begin 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, your child should press the PCA button again. If your child is not able to maintain a level of comfort that is acceptable, let the nurse know.

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### Can my child give too much medicine?

The PCA pump is designed with safe limits and programmed for a safe time between doses, which allows for your child to push the button as often as needed without always receiving a dose of medicine. But it is very important that no one else (not even you!) pushes the button for your child. Let your child be the guide.

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### Questions?

All members of the team are committed to partner with you and your child to improve pain. 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.