

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Your doctor has suggested patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) as a method of controlling your pain. A PCA allows you to give yourself small doses of pain medicine IV (into the vein). The pain medicine most commonly used in a PCA is a morphine-type drug. If you are allergic to morphine, other medicine can be used.

Most patients using a PCA find that they have better control and faster relief of their pain. Patients often use less pain medication and feel more alert.

*Pain control
is an important
part of your care.*

The PCA pump is attached to your IV line. The PCA pump has a cord with a button. When you have pain and press the button, the ordered dose of pain medicine flows into your IV line. The PCA pump will beep to let you know a dose has been given. Then it will lock for a short period. During this time, you will not be able to give yourself more pain medicine even if you press the button. This safety feature allows the medicine time to work and prevents you from receiving unnecessary doses. After this time period is up, the PCA pump unlocks and you can give yourself more medicine if you still have pain.

The PCA should make your pain tolerable to allow you to perform tasks to aid your recovery, such as walking, therapy, or deep breathing exercises.

The PCA is intended for your use only. Family members or visitors should never press the PCA button for you. When someone other than you presses the PCA button, they may be placing you at risk for giving you too much or unnecessary medication.

The pain medicine you are receiving may make you a little sleepy, but this effect often decreases with time. If you have itching or nausea, please tell your doctor or nurse, since medicine is available to relieve these side effects.

Most surgery patients stay on the PCA pump for a few days or until they are on a clear liquid diet. Once you are able to eat, the PCA pump is removed and you will take oral medicine for pain relief.

As always, please tell your doctor or nurse if you are having pain not controlled by the PCA or if you have any other questions or concerns.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312.926.3112, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363 or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312.695.1100, TDD/TTY 312.926.6363.

Developed by: NMH Anesthesia, Pain Management Services with the Department of Pharmacy