

UNITED LEEDS TEACHING HOSPITALS

ACUTE PAIN SERVICE

PAIN RELIEF AFTER YOUR OPERATION

At the Leeds General Infirmary Surgical Unit, we are trying to make patients as comfortable as possible after surgery. The following information explains about any discomfort or pain you may have and how we will try and relieve it for you. Do feel free to ask the doctors or nurses if anything is unclear or you have any unanswered questions about this or any other aspect of your care.

Introduction

When you wake up from your anaesthetic, the nurse looking after you will ask if you are comfortable. If you have any pain, please let the staff know and they can give you some pain killers straight away. Studies have shown that good pain relief allows you to recover from your operation more quickly and go home sooner, so do not be afraid of being honest about the amount of pain that you are getting.

Different types of pain relief

There are a variety of different methods available for managing your pain. **Every person is different** and there is a great variation in the amount of pain and discomfort that different patients feel following operations and also in the amount of pain killers that different people will need. The doctor who gives you your anaesthetic (the Anaesthetist) will decide what is the best method of pain relief for you personally. He or she may discuss this with you if they see you on the ward prior to your operation. Not every method is suitable for every patient!

Here are the most commonly used methods:

- **Injection**
The nurse will give you an injection into your thigh or your buttock at regular intervals to keep you pain free.
- **Patient controlled analgesia (PCA)**
This system consists of a pump, which is operated by a hand-held button. When you press the button, a small dose of the pain killing drug is given to you through your intravenous drip. In this way, you the patient, control how much pain killers you need. The system is very safe and you cannot overdose yourself, as the pump is set so you cannot give yourself beyond a certain pre-set amount.
- **Epidural Analgesia**
Although usually associated with pain relief during labour, this system is sometimes used to provide pain relief after other types of surgery. A very fine tube will be inserted before or during your operation into your epidural space (the area around your spine where the nerve endings are). Pain killing drugs are then given via this fine tube which provides pain relief from the level of the injection downwards. This will mean that your legs may feel numb. We will keep you sitting up while you have an epidural in place.
- **Tablets** Once you are able to start eating and drinking following your operation, you will be able to take your pain killers in tablet form. These come in different strengths, types and need to be given at different time intervals. The nursing staff will advise you how often you should take your pain killing tablets. Although the

nurses will offer you regular pain killers, do not be frightened of asking for some as soon as you have any pain. It is important to take your pain killers as soon as you start to get any “twinges” of pain rather than waiting until it is bad.

Other ways of reducing your pain include:

- Changing your position regularly. The nurses will help you to do this when you first come back from the operating theatre. This is important because it will help reduce the risk of complications.
- Using a pillow or your hands to support your wound. It is particularly important that you are able to cough and breathe deeply after an operation, so please ask for pain killers if you find these activities painful. The physiotherapist may come and help you with these.
- Once you are well enough, a warm bath may be helpful. Ask the nurses advice on this.
- Ensuring that you get adequate sleep and rest. This will help to reduce tension, which can make your pain worse. When you first come back from your operation, the nurses will make regular checks on your condition, including your pulse and blood pressure. This may disturb your sleep at night, so try and catch up during the day with regular “catnaps”.
- Avoiding becoming constipated. The nurses will talk to you about this and advise you on any additional medication you may need to take.

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