

HAVING A PATIENT CONTROLLED ANALGESIA (PCAS) AFTER YOUR OPERATION

At the Leeds General Infirmary Surgical Unit, we are trying to make patients as comfortable as possible after surgery.

Please read the following information carefully as it 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 nurse 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 you if you are comfortable. If you have any pain, please let the staff know and they can give you some pain relief 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 painkillers that different people will need. The doctor who gives you the anaesthetic (the anaesthetist) may discuss the PCAS with you on the ward, before your operation.

Not every method is suitable for every patient!

ABOUT PATIENT CONTROLLED ANALGESIA (PCAS)

What is patient controlled analgesia?

Patient controlled Analgesia (PCA) is one method of controlling the pain that you may experience following surgery. It uses conventional drugs (eg Morphine) which will be prescribed initially by your anaesthetist.

‘Patient Control’ means that you choose when you want to receive a dose of morphine, and you don’t have to wait for a nurse to bring you an injection.

How do I receive the pain killing drug?

The 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 killer you receive.

A trial handset will be made available for you to try before you go to the operating theatre. This is so that you will be familiar with the equipment before you have an anaesthetic.

How often should I press the button?

Whenever you feel pain. Most patients aim to get as comfortable as possible. Your requirement for pain relief will be greatest immediately after your operation, and should decrease over the next few days.

Is PCA safe? Could I overdose myself?

The PCAS machine is pre-set by the anaesthetist to give you a certain dose. It also has a 'lock out' time programmed into it. This ensures that even if you press the button continuously you will not receive any more pain killer until the end of the 'lock out' time. The pre- set time is usually 5-10 minutes. This safety feature aims to prevent you from overdosing. The nurses will monitor you and your machine.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effect is sickness, but this will vary in every patient. The sickness can be treated with other drugs, which can be given into your intravenous drip or by injection into your thigh or buttock.

You may also feel drowsy at times, and some people occasionally have hallucinations. You may also feel 'itchy'.

Will I become addicted?

You will only be on PCA for a relatively short period of time (this means that addiction is highly unlikely). Most patients have progressed onto oral medication after two/three days.

Will I be able to move about whilst I have PCA?

You will be actively encouraged to move around the ward area. You will be able to use your PCA before, during and after physiotherapy and nursing procedures, giving you effective pain relief.

Should I know anything about the pump itself?

The PCA machine is plugged into the mains supply. For when you are walking about the ward area it can be disconnected from the mains supply, as it has a back up battery.

If you hear a chirruping sound from your machine, this is a warning that:

- the syringe is almost empty. The nurses will replace it as soon as they can
- the battery is low and the machine needs to be reconnected to the mains