Intravenous Patient Controlled Analgesia (IV PCA)

Your doctor has prescribed IV PCA for you. This handout tells you how to use PCA. Your nurse will go over this with you. Please ask any questions you may have.

What Is Patient Controlled Analgesia?

Analgesia is the medical term for pain relief. With PCA, you are able to give your own dose of pain medicine. PCA is based on the belief that you are the best judge of how much pain you are feeling and that each person may need a different amount of medicine to relieve pain.

How IV PCA Works

The PCA system consists of two parts: a pump which is kept next to the bed, and a control button at the end of a cable which you keep at your side. Pain medicine from a syringe placed in the pump goes through tubing into your IV. Your nurse will set the pump to give the amount of medicine that your doctor has ordered for you.

To receive a dose of medicine, all you need to do is press the control button. When you press the button the medicine goes into your IV. For a short time (often 6-10 minutes) after you receive the dose, the pump will not give you another dose, even if you press the button again. This allows time for the medicine to work. If after a brief wait, you still have pain, press the button again to receive a second dose. The control button will light up when another dose is available for you. It is common to have to press the button several times each hour to keep pain under control.

Why should I have a PCA?

PCA allows you to take the pain medicine when you feel you need it. You get it right away, because you do not need to call your nurse. Also, since it goes into your IV, it can work quickly. Finally, the smaller, more frequent doses used with PCA allow you to have a steady amount of pain relief with little or no drowsiness.
When Should I Use the PCA Pump?

Use the PCA pump:

- When your pain is getting worse
- A few minutes before you start something that can cause pain (such as turning, walking, or coughing and deep breathing)

Give yourself enough medicine to be comfortable. The medicine will not make you pain-free, but it should allow you to rest and move around.

Your nurse will check with you to make certain you are comfortable, and that you are using the pump as you should. Please tell your doctors and nurses if you feel you cannot control your pain. The amount of medicine you receive may be changed to give you better pain control. You must tell your nurses and doctors how your pain medicine is working so they can change the dose, its timing, or the drug if your pain is not controlled.

You will no longer need PCA when your doctors and nurses feel you are ready to take pills and that your pain can be controlled with pills.

For Your Safety

It is important that only you, the patient, press the button to receive the pain medicine. Family members and friends should never press the button for you unless a doctor or nurse has said that they may. If this is needed, a single person will be given directions on how to do this safely.