When You Have Both an IV PCA and PCEA

This handout explains the use of two types of patient-controlled medicine - IV Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) and patient controlled epidural analgesia (PCEA). PCA is based on the beliefs that you (the patient) are the best judge of how much pain you are feeling and that the amount of pain medicine needed can vary from patient to patient.

**Epidural**

**Timing:** Can be pushed every 30 minutes, depends on the doctor’s order

When you have an epidural, a tiny tube is placed in the space outside the spinal cord and numbing medicine runs through the tube. You are getting medicine nonstop when the epidural is on, but you can also push the PCEA button (see image) that gives you an extra dose of medicine. It works best for sharp pain in or around your incision. It helps if you push the PCEA button 10 minutes before you get up or move around in bed for extra pain relief.

The PCEA button has a green flashing light that lets you know when you are able to get a dose of medicine. If the light is not flashing, it is too soon to get another dose.

**Drawbacks:**
This medicine may cause itching or low blood pressure. Please tell your nurse if the itching is bothering you. There are medicines that can help treat the itching.

**PCA**

**Timing:** Every 6-10 minutes, depends on the doctor’s order

This allows you to give yourself your own dose of “opioid” pain medicine through your IV to help control pain. Use this button for pain that is deep in your incision or pain in places the epidural is not working. It helps if you push it 5 minutes before you get up or move in bed for some extra pain relief.

The PCA button lights up green when you are able to get a dose of medicine. If the light is not green, it is too soon to get another dose.

**Drawbacks:**
The medicine is quick to work but it does not last very long. It can also:
- Cause you to be sleepy or nauseous.
- Slow down your bowels so you need a stool softener or laxative with it.
- Slow your breathing.
For Your Safety
For a short time after you get a dose from the PCA or PCEA, the pump will not give you any more medicine, even if you press the button again.

It is important that only you, the patient, press the button to get pain medicine. Family members and friends or visitors should **never** press the button.