

# You Can Control Your Pain Using a PCA (Patient-controlled Analgesia) Pump

## What is a PCA Pump?

PCA stands for patient-controlled analgesia. Analgesia means relief of pain. The PCA pump is a small machine that lets you give yourself a dose of pain medicine when you need it.

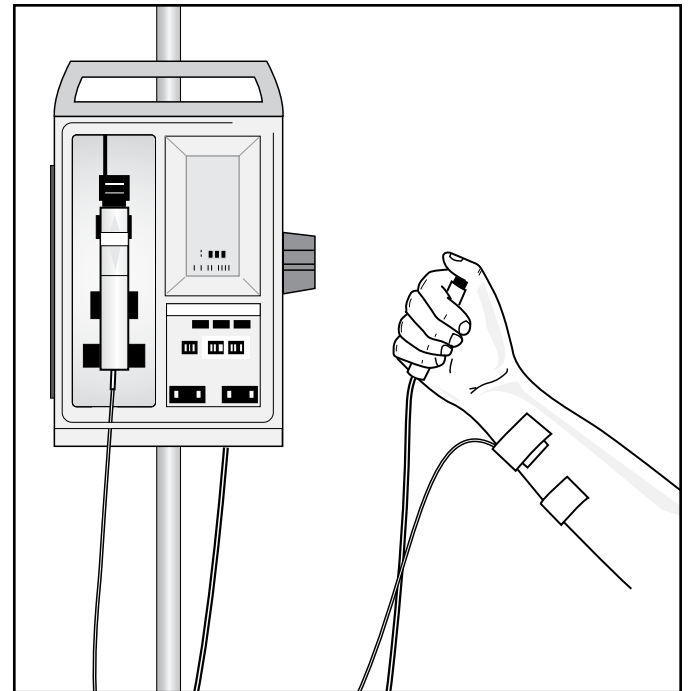
A small tube connects the pump to an intravenous (IV) catheter in your vein. The tube will carry the pain medicine right to your bloodstream.

You will have a hand-held button to push when you need pain relief. This will release the amount of medicine your doctor has prescribed for you.

Nurses will program the pump to make sure you get the right dose of medicine each time. Timers prevent the pump from releasing medicine too often. When you start to feel discomfort, push and release the button for a dose of medicine.

The push button control prevents you from getting a dose by mistake. Rolling onto the button or bumping it will not give you a dose. You must push and release the button before you get any medicine.

Take pain medicine when the pain first begins. If you know your pain may get worse with activity, take your pain medicine before the activity. Don't wait for pain to get worse before taking medicine.



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**This is what a PCA pump looks like.**

If your pain is well-managed but you feel the pain medicine is making you feel too sleepy, you may want to wait to give yourself a dose. Whenever you have a question about the best thing to do for your pain, ask your nurse.

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## Why Use a PCA Pump?

Your doctor has prescribed a PCA pump because the pain medicine goes directly into your bloodstream. This means that:

- it starts working quickly to decrease the pain, usually within minutes
- you may need less medicine, which means you may have fewer side effects such as drowsiness, upset stomach or itching
- you can manage your own pain and take only as much medicine as you need to keep yourself comfortable and free from pain.
- The pump should not interfere with activities you will be doing, such as bathing, walking or coughing.

## Can Family Members or Others Push the PCA Button?

No. For your safety, family members and other health care providers are not allowed to push the PCA button for you.

## Can You Leave the Unit While You Have a PCA?

No. For your safety, you may not leave the nursing unit while you are connected to the PCA pump except for tests and procedures.

## What if the Pump Does Not Seem to Be Working?

If your pain has not improved after the pushing the PCA button 2 or 3 times within 30 minutes, tell your nurse. There may be problems with the pump or your nurse may need to contact your doctor to adjust the dose of pain medicine.

## What are the Alarm Sounds for?

The pump can sound an alarm for many reasons. If the alarm sounds, call your nurse. The alarm gives the nurse information about the pump.

## How Long Will You Use the Pump?

You, your doctor and nurse will discuss how long you can use the pump. Once your pain is improving and you can eat and drink, you will switch from the PCA pump to pain medicine by mouth.

## When Should You Call Your Nurse?

Tell your nurse if you have:

- pain that does not improve or gets worse
- upset stomach
- vomiting
- itching
- sleep problems or problems staying awake during the day
- other unusual symptoms.