

Why is PCA a good idea?

- Injections of pain medicine involve needle pokes; medicine given by PCA pump doesn't hurt.
- PCA provides constant and immediate pain relief.
- Your child feels "in charge" of the pain control.
- The amount of pain medicine given can be adjusted rapidly, as needed.
- Your child will have better and more consistent pain relief which will make movement, coughing and deep breathing exercises easier. Your child will get up sooner, recover more quickly and heal faster.

Please talk to your child's nurse or doctor about any concerns you have.

Ask questions. Tell us about your child's usual behaviour when in pain.

At this hospital we believe parents are partners in caring for a child. We want to share what we know with you and have you share what you know and see with us.

The Family Resource Library at BC Children's Hospital has more information about pain. The library is on the 2nd floor of the Ambulatory Care Building. It has an interactive computer program as well as books and pamphlets about pain. You can also access the Family Resource Library online at www.bcchildrens.ca/frl

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

*Developed by the health care professionals
of the Acute Pain Service with assistance
from the Department of Learning &
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What is Patient Controlled Analgesia?

Patient controlled analgesia or PCA is a way for your child to get good pain control from intravenous (IV) medicine. The medicine most often used in a PCA is morphine. If your child is allergic to morphine, we may use hydromorphone or fentanyl instead.

How does it work?

An intravenous tube is connected to a computerized machine called a PCA pump by the nurse caring for your child. The pump can deliver pain medicine in two ways.

1. It can deliver pain medicine constantly and/or;
2. It can deliver pain medicine when your child presses a PCA button to get a dose of medicine when he/she is having pain. The medicine goes through the IV line into your child's bloodstream so that it acts quickly.

Is it safe?

PCA is a safe method of giving pain medicine. The anesthesiologist doctor, who is a specialist in pain control, decides on the correct pain medicine dose. The nurse sets the computerized pump. The pump allows only a safe dose into the tubing at one time. It shuts out the dose if your child presses the button more often than is safe. Nursing staff will watch your child and the equipment to make sure that there are no problems. A nurse and anesthesiologist who specialize in pain management in children will visit your child daily.

Will it control the pain?

Experience shows that children with PCA give themselves doses that keep an even supply of medicine in the body. They get enough pain medicine to control their pain but not so much that they are sleepy.

Your child's comfort is an important part of the care we give. The nurse caring for your child will look for any signs of pain. Tell the nurse or the doctor if you think the child is in pain. The doctor may change the settings and dose on the PCA pump until the pain is under control.

This method of pain control works well for most children. If, for any reason, pain cannot be controlled in this way, the doctor or nurse will discuss other pain control options with you.

How long will pain medicine be given in this way?

Typically, PCA will be used until your child's pain can be controlled by swallowed medicine.

Are there side effects?

Any medicine used to control pain can have side effects. The most common side effects are:

- Drowsiness/sleepiness
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Itching
- Altered mood or unusual dreams
- Difficulty emptying the bladder. Because of this, a catheter (plastic tube into the bladder) is usually put in place in the operating room. This will drain the urine until the PCA medicine is no longer needed.
- Problems breathing

The nurse will watch your child carefully for any signs of these side effects. They can all be treated. Talk with the doctor or nurse if you are concerned about possible side effects.