

## **Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)**

Your doctor has prescribed PCA for you. PCA stands for patient controlled analgesia, which is a system that is used to treat pain. This handout tells you how to use PCA. Your nurse will go over this information with you. Please feel welcome to ask questions.

### **What Is Patient Controlled Analgesia?**

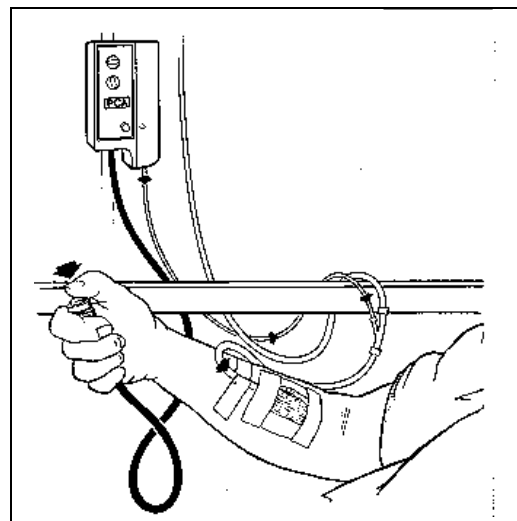
Analgesia is the medical term for pain relief. With patient controlled analgesia, patients are able to give themselves their own dose of pain-relieving medication. PCA is based on the belief that the patient is the best judge of how much pain he or she is feeling and that each individual may need different amounts of medicine to relieve pain.

### **How Does PCA Work?**

The PCA system consists of two parts: a computerized infusion 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 medication from a syringe placed in the pump is delivered through tubing into your IV. Your nurse will set the pump to deliver the amount of medication which your doctor has ordered for you.

*To receive a dose of medication, all you need to do is press the control button. When you press the button the medication will be delivered into your IV. For a short time (usually 6-10 minutes) after you receive the dose, the pump will not deliver any more medication, even if you press the button again. This allows time for the medication to work.*

*If after a brief wait, you still have pain, press the button again to receive a second dose. It is common to have to press the button several times each hour to keep pain under control.*



## What Are the Benefits of PCA?

PCA allows you to take the pain-relieving medication when you feel you need it. There is little delay in receiving the medication because you do not need to call your nurse. Also, since the medication goes into your IV, it can work quickly, and you will not need to receive a needle stick or "shot". 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:

- whenever you feel an uncomfortable level of pain, and;
- a few minutes before you start activities that cause discomfort (such as turning, walking, or coughing and deep breathing).

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

The nurse caring for you will check with you to make certain you are comfortable, and that you are using the pump correctly. Please tell your doctors and nurses if you feel you are unable to control your pain. The amount of medication you receive may be adjusted to help you be more comfortable. It is important to tell your nurses and doctors how your pain medicine is working so they can change the dose, its timing, or the medicine 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 relieved with pills.

## For Your Safety

*It is important that **only you**, the patient, press the button to receive the pain-relieving medication. Family members and friends should **never** press the button for you.*