Managing Your Pain with Oral Patient Controlled Analgesia (Oral PCA)

Information for patients and families

Read this resource to learn:

• What it is
• Why it is important
• How it works
• Possible side effects
Why is it important to relieve my pain?
You will get better faster if your pain is well controlled.

Less pain means less stress on your body. Your body heals better with less stress. You can breathe deeply and cough and move more easily.

Less pain will decrease your risk of problems such as:

- Infection
- Trouble breathing
- Muscle spasms
- Heart attack

Your health care team will work with you to help you manage your pain. One way to manage your pain is with oral patient controlled analgesia (oral PCA).

What is oral PCA?
Oral patient controlled analgesia (oral PCA) is a form of pain management. This kind of pain management lets you control when you take your pain medicine. The nurse will put pain medicine beside your bed. You can take it at the appropriate time.

How does it work?
1. The nurse will give you pain medicine to keep beside your bed. You will only be given one dose of opioid pain medicine at a time.
2. Take the pain medicine when you feel pain.
3. Call the nurse right away so that they can replace your medicine. They will bring it within 30 minutes.
Do not take more than 1 dose within 2 hours.

What kind of pain medicine will I be given?
The doctor or nurse practitioner will talk to you about what they think is the best choice of pain medicine for you.

If you have taken pain medicine before, you should let them know what worked well or what did not work well to manage your pain.

What will I have to do?
You will need to:

1. Write down the time you took your pain medicine.

2. Write down how much pain you are feeling on a flow sheet. You will be asked to rate your pain on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain you can imagine.

3. Call the nurse right away to replace any pain medicine that you take.

Tell your nurse, nurse practitioner, doctor or other member of your health care team if:

• You have any side effects
• You are still feeling pain
• Your pain medicine is missing

I just took my pain medicine. When will it start to work?
It takes about 30 minutes to 45 minutes for you to start feeling pain relief.

Your pain relief should last about 3 to 4 hours.
What are the side effects of opioid pain medicine?
Some side effects you may get are:

- Constipation
- Sleepiness
- Nausea (wanting to throw up)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Itching

Talk to your nurse or doctor if you have any of these side effects. They will help you to treat them.

When should I take my pain medicine?
Take your pain medicine before your pain becomes very bad (generally if it is greater or equal to 4 out of 10 or in the moderate range).

You may want to take pain medicine:

- Before you do something that brings on the pain. For example, take it before you do your physiotherapy.
- Before breathing and coughing exercises.
- Before you start to move or turn.

Talk to your nurse, physiotherapist, occupational therapist or a pharmacist about the best time to take your pain medicine.
Can I get addicted to my pain medicine?

It is very unlikely you will become addicted to the pain medicine.

About 5 in 100 people have a chance of developing opioid use disorder if they take opioids for more than 7 days.

Use as much pain medicine (as it is prescribed) as you need to keep your pain under control. Take an active role in your own health care.

Can I overdose myself?

It is highly unlikely that you will experience an overdose. You will be controlling when you take the medicine. However, we encourage you to speak with your health care team if you have had any previous concerns with medications. This will help us to plan for your pain relief.

Your nurse, nurse practitioner and doctor will be controlling how much and what kind of medicine you are prescribed.

They will make sure that you get the right dose of pain medicine. They will also check on how well the pain medicine is working for you.

Are there ways to control my pain other than taking medicine?

Along with taking medicine, here are some other things you can do:

- Apply ice packs or heat packs (be sure to follow the instructions on the package)
- Do slow, deep breathing exercises
- Imagery
- Try relaxation exercises
- Find a distraction (like watching TV, music)
Ask your nurse or doctor if you would like to learn more about these treatments.

For more information about managing your pain at UHN:

- Visit the UHN website at [www.uhn.ca](http://www.uhn.ca) and search for Department of Anesthesia and Pain Management.
- Visit [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca) and see health topic “Pain” under Search for Health Information.

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