

# Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

## What Is a PCA?

PCA stands for patient controlled analgesia.

## How Does a PCA Work?

The PCA is a small pump that is attached to a patient's IV tube. It gives a continuous dose of pain medicine. When patients feel pain, they push a pain button that is attached to the PCA pump. This will give them an extra dose of pain medicine. Patients need to be awake enough to push the pain button when they need some medicine.

## Can Patients Receive Too Much Medicine?

Yes, patients could receive too much pain medicine. If they do get too much pain medicine, it might lower the breathing rate and make them sleepier. When other pain medicines are given along with PCA medicine, the patient can become even sleepier. The risk is less if patients are awake enough to push their own pain buttons.

Patients will be on a monitor to measure their heart and breathing rates the entire time they have a PCA. Some patients are more sensitive to pain medicines. A nurse will check on the patients' pain levels regularly and make sure they're not too sleepy. Let a nurse know right away if there are any concerns about the patient.

Patients, who don't have the ability to push their pain buttons, can have a nurse or caregiver do it for them. When someone other than the patient pushes the pain button, it is called dosing by proxy. Dosing by proxy requires a doctor's order.

If a caregiver agrees to help push the pain button, they will be expected to sign an agreement. The caregiver must work with a nurse to prevent overdosing PCA medicine. The PCA is set to give only a certain number of doses. A nurse will show the caregiver how to safely push the button when pain is experienced or anticipated. For example, that might happen when a patient is moved or gets up for the first time. Let a nurse know right away if there are any concerns about the patient.

## Do All Patients Get a PCA?

The doctors will help patients and caregivers decide if a PCA pump is right for the patient.

## Who Decides When to Stop Using the PCA?

The PCA is only used until patients are ready to take pain medicine by mouth or G-tube. The patients' doctors decide when to stop the PCA.

[Appointment: 651-290-8707](#) [Refer a Patient: 651-325-2200](#) [Pediatric Expert Consult](#) [More Ways to Contact Us](#)

This information is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice of your health care providers. If you have any questions, talk with your doctor or others on your health care team.

If you are a Gillette patient with urgent questions or concerns, please contact Telehealth Nursing at [651-229-3890](#).