Managing your child's pain with morphine or Fentanyl (nurse or patient controlled analgesia)

Children's Hospital

Information for Patients

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Introduction

We know that coming into hospital is a worrying time for you and your child. You may also have the added concern that your child may be in pain. The pain may be due to their medical condition or after surgery.

Analgesia is the name of any medicine that can give pain relief. Nurse controlled analgesia (NCA) and patient controlled analgesia (PCA) are different ways pain relief medicine can be given to manage your child's pain.

What medicines are used?

The drug we use for PCA and NCA is morphine or fentanyl. This is a strong painkiller which is used for moderate to severe pain. The amount of morphine or fentanyl given to your child is worked out carefully using their age and weight. It is then diluted with salty water (saline) in a syringe.

Morphine or fentanyl is not addictive when given for pain relief over a short period of time. A nurse will be checking your child regularly while they are on PCA or NCA.

How is PCA and NCA given?

Your child will have a thin plastic tube called a cannula inserted into a vein in their arm, hand or foot. We do this when they are on the ward or in theatre. This is then connected to a special locked pump through some tubing. The pump is programmed to a prescription specific to your child.

What is PCA and how does it work?

This lets your child give themselves small amounts of medicine for pain relief when they need it. Your child is the only person who knows how much pain they have and when pain relief is working. Therefore, it makes sense to let them have control of safely giving themselves pain relief.

Your child will control PCA through a handset with a button. By pressing the button on the handset, they will get a small amount of morphine or fentanyl solution directly into their vein. They will not feel it being given. When your child has some pain they should press the button and wait a few minutes for the morphine or fentanyl to work.

The pump is programmed to make sure that your child cannot give themselves too much of the medicine. They will only be able to have **1 dose every 5 minutes**. This is even if your child presses the button often. The pump will only give pain relief every 5 minutes.

It is very important that only your child presses the button. Parents, family members and friends should not press the button. Even the doctor and nurse will not press the button.

If you feel your child is in pain, encourage them to press the button, especially before moving. It is very important not to let the pain build up before encouraging your child to press the button.

Sometimes whilst on PCA, a very small dose of morphine or fentanyl can also be given continuously through the vein (continuous infusion) to help maintain a good level of pain relief.

What is NCA and how does it work?

NCA is used for babies or children that cannot use the button themselves to give the pain relief.

When the nurse presses on a button on the equipment, the pain medicine goes directly into your child's vein. They will not feel the morphine being given.

The pump is programmed to make sure that your child cannot be given too much of the pain relief medicine. Only the nurse or doctor will be able to press the button as we need to monitor how much is given. Parents, carers or family members cannot press the button.

The pump will only allow a certain calculated amount of medicine to be given. It is programmed to only give **1 dose every 20 minutes**. The button is **never** pressed when a child is sleeping.

Sometimes whilst on NCA, a very small dose of morphine or fentanyl can also be given continuously through the vein (continuous infusion) to help maintain a good level of pain relief.

How do we know if it is working?

While your child is using the PCA or NCA they will be closely monitored. They will have a small 'peg' or plaster attached to 1 of their fingers to monitor their heart rate and the amount of oxygen in their blood (this will not hurt). The nurse will also check their breathing, pain level and any side effects.

The nurse will use special tools to assess and document your child's pain. If your child is old enough, we will ask them to choose a tool to help them express their pain level.

During the PCA or NCA your child will be given other pain relief at the same time, for example, paracetamol and ibuprofen. Research shows that if a child is given additional pain relief that work in different ways, they can manage pain a lot better.

Are there any side effects?

While on the PCA or NCA your child may complain of feeling:

- sleepy
- itchy
- sick (nausea) or be sick (vomiting)
- constipation (for more longer use)

The nurse will regularly check if your child is having any side effects and will give other medicines to help with these if needed. It is also important to ask your child how they are feeling and to let the nurse know.

When will the PCA or NCA be stopped?

This will depend on your child's pain levels, their medical condition and/or type of surgery they have had. It will be stopped sooner if it is not working well or if we are unable to effectively manage any side effects. If this happens, different pain-relieving medicines will be given.

Once the PCA or NCA is stopped your child will continue to have other pain-relieving medicines such as paracetamol and ibuprofen.

If you have any concerns or questions please speak to the nurse looking after your child.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice
Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead
or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net

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