

## Fact Sheet

# Managing your pain after your surgery

[womensnewbornhealth.com.au](http://womensnewbornhealth.com.au)

### Pain after surgery

Pain is the unpleasant feeling that you may have after an injury or surgery. Enduring pain has no benefit and sometimes may interfere with your recovery.

### A pain management plan

Before you have surgery talk to your doctors or nurses about which pain medicines would be best for you after your operation. Please inform them about:

- any allergies that you have to medicines
- any chronic pain that you may have
- any pain medicines that you already use for pain management or that have worked well for you in the past
- any concerns or unanswered questions about pain.

### Reporting Your Pain

Everyone experiences pain differently. Your own report of pain is the most reliable measure of how your pain is. It is important for your comfort and safety that you inform your doctors and nurses about any pain that you have. Your reports of pain can assist in the choice of medicines used to best achieve your pain relief.

You will be asked by the nurses at regular intervals to report your pain using words such as 'mild, moderate, severe, or numbers from '0' to '10'. You will be asked to rate your pain when you are resting and when you are moving because the pain may vary with activity.



### Options for Pain Management

Pain can be managed by using a few methods rather than just by one. These are just some of the ways pain medicines can be given:

- as tablets to swallow
- through a tube in your vein (an IV)
- injections into the arm or leg.

There are other special methods for giving pain medicines including PCA and epidural. These are explained briefly in this leaflet.

### Pain Medicines

There are a number of medicines that can be used to help manage pain after surgery. Your doctor may prescribe more than one pain medicine at a time.

It is important that you tell your doctor or nurse promptly if your pain is not well managed. It may be that the pain medicines that are being used need to be changed.

Some of the common medicines used for managing pain are explained below.

- **Paracetamol** is often used to manage postoperative pain. The risk of side effects is low. Your doctor will prescribe the correct dose for you based on your age and weight
- **Non steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs** (NSAIDs) can help to reduce inflammation pain. They can often help in managing pain when combined with other pain medicines. Not all patients can have NSAIDs. Your doctor will check to make sure they are suitable for you.
  - *Some of the NSAIDs used in hospital include diclofenac (Voltaren ®), and ibuprofen (Brufen ®, Nurofen ®). Side effects with these medicines are more common than paracetamol so your doctor may only prescribe them for a few days for you*
- **Opioid medicines** can include morphine, oxycodone (Endone ®), fentanyl, and tramadol (Trama/ ®). These medicines can be very effective for treating moderate and severe pain

womensnewbornhealth.com.au

after surgery or an injury. *Sometimes they may cause nausea and vomiting, slowing of breathing, drowsiness, itching and constipation.*

The nurses will monitor you and these side effects can be managed if they occur.

Most pain medicines can have side effects. They are usually not serious and not everyone will get them. Side effects can be managed by treatment or by changing to a different medicine .

Talk to the doctors, nurses or a pharmacist about the medicines chosen for you and any possible side effects they may have.

### Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

PCA stands for patient controlled analgesia. It means that after your operation, you can be in control of the strong pain medicine that you need. By pressing a button, you can give yourself a small dose of a pain drug, usually morphine or fentanyl, through an intravenous cannula into one of your veins.

The button can be pressed every 5 minutes if you have pain. You will need to keep giving yourself doses to remain comfortable.

If you need to move, sit up, turn over or get out of bed, always remember to press your button first. You can also use your button before any physiotherapy.

PCA is a safe way of controlling your pain as the pump is programmed to deliver a dose of pain medicine especially chosen for your individual needs. You cannot give yourself too much.

Sometimes the medicines can cause nausea and vomiting, which can be treated.

The risk of becoming addicted to medicines like morphine is extremely rare when used to treat pain. Only you, as the patient, should press the button. You must not allow visitors or family to use the PCA button for you.

### Epidural Analgesia

Compared with other methods, epidural analgesia can be the most effective method of pain relief after major surgery with minimal side effects.

Epidural analgesia infusions are not available at all hospitals. Check with your doctor or nurse to see if it is suitable and if it can be provided after your operation.

Having an epidural involves placing a fine tube, called a catheter, into the upper or lower part of the back. Pain-relieving medicines can then be given during and after the operation. These medicines are used to numb the nerves, which help to make you comfortable.

Complications sometimes occur; most are minor and easily treated. These can include:

- The epidural not working properly. Efforts will be made to improve pain relief; otherwise other medicines can be used.
- Low blood pressure. Extra fluids can help manage this problem.
- Slight temporary numbness, heaviness or weakness in your legs.

Some very rare complications can occur to people having epidural analgesia. The catheter may become infected which can cause pain or tenderness at the site where the catheter sits.

The epidural would be removed and other pain medicines used. Another rare problem is bleeding near the catheter site and spinal cord. Prompt treatment can prevent any permanent nerve damage.

Talk to your doctor if you have any more questions about having an epidural after surgery.

Street parking is available near the hospital or within the hospital grounds for a fee.

**We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.**

**Send your feedback to:**

WSLHD-Get\_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au