When You Have Both an IV PCA and PCEA

This handout explains IV patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) and patient-controlled epidural analgesia (PCEA). You are the best judge of your pain. The amount of pain medicine you need may be different from what others need.

PCA

With a PCA, you can give yourself a dose of opioid pain medicine through your IV. Use the PCA for deep pain in your incision or pain where the epidural does not work.

You may be able to press the PCA button every 10-20 minutes. This depends on your doctor's order. The button lights up green when you can get a dose. If the light is not green, it is too soon for another dose.

For more pain relief, press the PCA button 5 minutes before you plan to get up or move in bed.

Side Effects

The medicine works fast, but it does not last long. It can:

- Make you sleepy or sick to your stomach
- Slow your bowels. Take a stool softener or laxative with it
- Slow your breathing
- Not work as well over time
- Lead to long-term dependence

PCEA

With a PCEA, numbing medicine and opioid medicine are given through a small tube near your spinal cord. You can press the PCEA button for an extra dose of numbing medicine.

You may be able to press the button every 30 minutes, based on your doctor's order. A green flashing light means you can get a dose. If the light is not flashing, it is too soon.

PCEA works best for sharp pain in or near your incision. For more pain relief, press the button 10 minutes before you get up or move in bed.

Use the PCEA button before the PCA button.

Side Effects

PCEA may:

- Make your legs numb or weak
- Cause low blood pressure
- Cause itching. We can give you medicine to help

For Your Safety

After you get a dose from the PCA or PCEA, the pump will not give you more medicine for a short time. Pressing the button again will not give you another dose during this time.

Only you should press the button for pain medicine. Family, friends, and visitors should **never** press the button for you, even when you are sleeping.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6167