

Patient Information Leaflet

Controlling Pain After Surgery

**Prepared by:
Acute Pain Team**

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There are many treatments which can be successful in helping to prevent and control pain. You, your doctors and nurses will decide which ones are right for you. Many people combine two or more methods to get relief. Your pain is personal to you; the amount you feel may not be the same as others feel, even those who have had the same operation, so the medical staff will need your help in determining the best plan for you.

What are the options ?

Some of the ways in which pain can be reduced are described here. Of course not all of these methods will be suitable for every operation.

Oral medications (things you swallow): This includes tablets and syrup and most patients will be prescribed one or more of these as pain killers. Pain killing tablets are usually given regularly and it is important that you take them to help you maintain a good level of pain relief. The syrup will be given to you as you require it and you will have to ask the nurse for it. You may need to continue taking the tablets for a while even after you return home.

Injections: These are not often given these days, the preferred way of taking pain killers is by mouth. Injections will only be used if you are for some reason unable to swallow tablets/syrup and you do not wish to take suppositories. If you have an episode of severe pain then a doctor or suitably qualified nurse will be able to give you a strong pain killer directly into your vein which should give immediate relief. You will then continue to take oral preparations.

Local Anaesthetic: The area of the operation can be numbed with local anaesthetic by the surgeon or anaesthetist during surgery. The pain relieving effect can sometimes last for several hours after surgery.

Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA): As the name suggests, you are in control of your own pain relief. Pain killers are injected into your bloodstream through a drip into your arm by pressing a button which is attached to a special pump. Having a PCA means that you do not need the nurse or doctor to give you pain killers into your vein because you can give yourself a dose whenever you need it. You should give yourself a 'boost' before moving around or having physiotherapy. Each pump is specially programmed for individual patients so that the risk of overdose is very small. While you are using the pump you will be carefully watched for any side effects. You may feel drowsy or you may have itching or nausea while using the pump, but there are medicines to treat these side effects.

Remember: although you do not need to ask the nurses for pain relief if you have a PCA, they will be happy to help if you need it and will want to know if you are in pain, your medication may need adjusting.

You will still take tablets even with a PCA to help give you the best pain relief possible.

Epidurals: These are a very effective form of pain relief which may be available to some people who are having major surgery; they are similar to the epidurals that are given to women during child birth. Local anaesthetic, and sometimes strong pain killers, are given through a fine tube which is inserted into your back. These drugs block the nerves which transmit pain messages to the brain. Patients with epidurals generally find breathing, coughing and moving much easier and there is less sedative effect than with PCA. Patients with epidurals will still be given other pain killers to maximise their pain relief.

Non-drug methods: Understanding about the operation and the pain expected afterwards can go a long way to reducing anxiety which can often make pain worse. It is important to ask questions of the doctors and nurses caring for you, they will be pleased to tell you what to expect. Whilst you will be encouraged to start moving as soon as it is safe after the operation, pacing yourself and getting enough rest is important to the healing process.

Most operations are associated with some discomfort, depending on what has been done. Luckily post operative pain is usually short lived. With current treatments, however, pain at any time after surgery is no longer something that patients just have to put up with.

Remember: It is much easier to prevent pain, or to treat it as soon as it starts, than to bring it under control if it becomes too severe; So It is important to tell the doctor or nurse if your pain is not controlled; they want and need to know so that your treatment can be altered and refined to suit you.

Pain control can help you:

- enjoy greater comfort while you heal.
- get well faster; with less pain you can start walking, doing breathing exercises and getting your strength back more quickly, you may even go home sooner.
- improve your results. People whose pain is well controlled seem to do better after surgery.

They may avoid some problems such as pneumonia and blood clots that can affect others

You can get further information on all sorts of health issues through NHS interactive available through Sky TV or online at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/>

For Health advice and out of hours GP service please call Island Health Line on 0845 6031007

We Value Your Views On Our Service

If you wish to comment on the care which you, your relative or friend has received, we will be pleased to hear from you. Please speak to the person in charge of the ward, clinic or service in the first instance or ask them to contact the Quality Team. If you wish to contact them directly, telephone on 534850.

Alternatively you may prefer to write to:

Chief Executive
Isle Of Wight NHS Trust
St Mary's Hospital
Newport
Isle of Wight
PO30 5TG

You can also share any concerns you have about our services with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) on 03000 61 61 61 or at enquires@cqc.org.uk

All NHS sites are no smoking areas.

If you would like help and advice to stop smoking please call: 01983 550386 to talk to Island Quitters.

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