Let's Talk About...

Patient-controlled analgesia (PCA)

Pain is very hard to measure. You know when your child is in pain, but only your child knows how much pain she is in. Patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) is a way for your child to control her own pain medication.

What is the Pain Service Team?

Your child may need PCA after surgery or for pain caused by illness or an injury. A Pain Service team, consisting of an anesthesiologist (an-ess-thee-zee-OL-o jist) and nurses, will decide what kind of medication and dose your child will need. They will monitor your child and adjust her medication as needed.

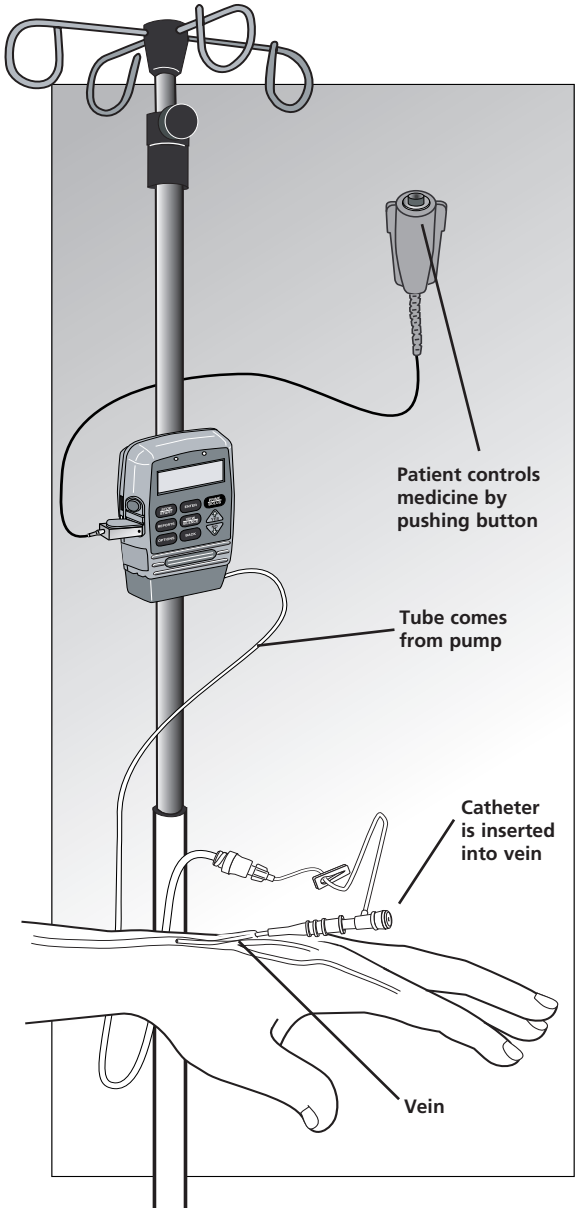
How is the medication given?

The pain medication is given through a tiny tube called an intravenous (in-ter-VAIN-us) catheter (KATH-et-er), or IV (See the ***Let's Talk About... Placing an IV***). The most common place for an IV is the back of the hand, but there are many other areas that an IV can be placed. Your child will probably already have an IV from surgery or other procedures.

Your child will have a button to push to receive pain medication. The button is connected to a pump. When your child pushes the button, a computer pumps pain medication to her through the IV.

Can my child get too much medication?

No. The PCA pump will only release a certain amount of medicine at a time. If the button is pushed too soon after the last dose, the pump will not respond. No matter how often your child pushes the button, she will not get too much medicine. Your nurse and the Pain Service can gauge the amount of pain your child is in by how many times she tries to use the PCA. Only your child or her nurse should push the button.



Will all of the pain go away?

No. The PCA should make your child feel more comfortable, but will not take away all of the pain. Tell your child's nurse or the Pain Service if your child is still uncomfortable after using the pump.

Are there any side effects?

Everyone responds to pain medication differently. Some pain medicine can make your child drowsy. Her nurse will watch her closely to make sure she is not too sleepy. If you notice your child is very sleepy or her breathing is different, tell your nurse.

Your child may have an upset stomach, throw up, or itch. She may be given other medications if the side effects are serious.

How can I help?

The Pain Service and your child's nurses will try and help your child to be as comfortable as possible. They will ask you and your child about her pain. Sometimes they will use a scale with cartoon faces or numbers to help your child tell them how much pain she is in.

How long will my child use the pump?

There are several signs that may show that your child can stop using the PCA pump:

- She is more comfortable.
- She is eating and drinking.
- Pain is being controlled by medicine taken by the mouth.
- She stops pushing the PCA button.

Primary Children's Medical Center will work as a team with you and your child. Together, we can provide the best pain relief possible. Please ask your doctor, nurse, or the Pain Service team any questions that you may have.

Intermountain
Primary Children's
Medical Center
Healing for life℠

Pediatric Education Services
801.662.3500 Rev. 08/09

© Primary Children's Medical Center 2009

All of the information contained in the ***Let's Talk About . . .*** series is for educational purposes only. This educational information is not a substitute for medical advice or for care from a physician or other health care professional. If you have questions about your child's health, contact your health care provider.