

Let's Talk About...

Patient-controlled Epidural Analgesia

Analgisia (anl-jēZHā) means pain relief. One way to relieve pain is to deliver pain medicine right to the nerves that send pain messages to the brain. Your child's doctor or his anesthesiologist (an-ess-thee-zee-OL-o jist) may recommend epidural analgesia to help control his pain after surgery.

What is the Pain Service Team?

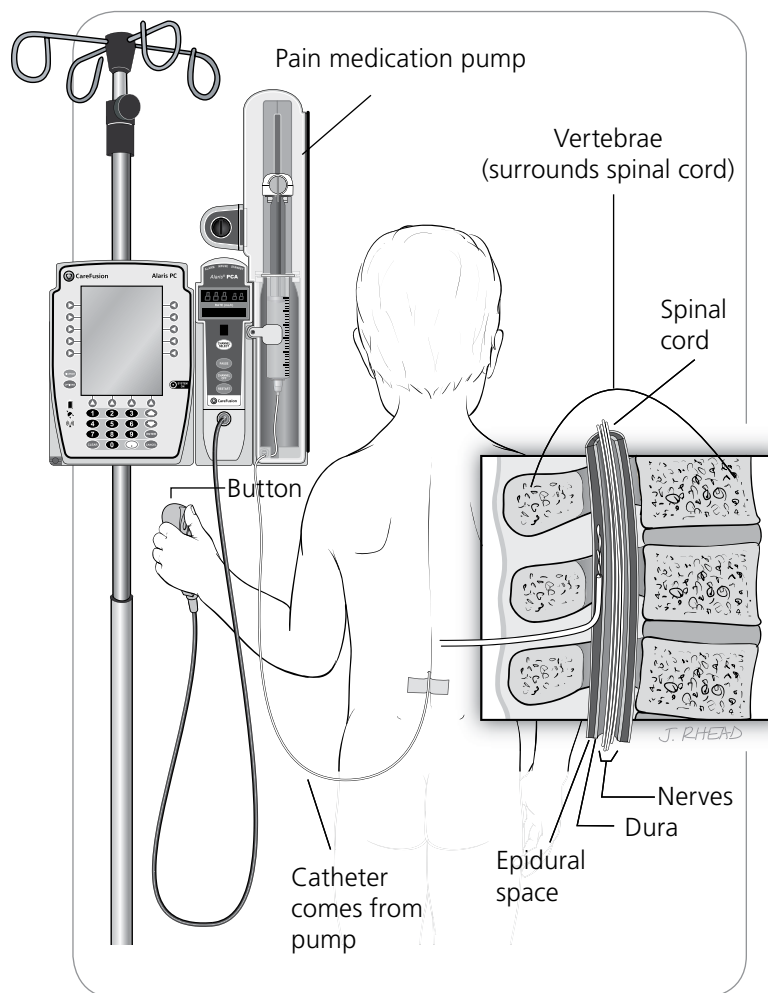
Your child may need patient-controlled epidural analgesia (PCEA) after surgery or for pain caused by illness or an injury. A Pain Service team, consisting of an anesthesiologist and nurses, will decide what kind of medicine and dose your child will need. They will monitor your child and adjust his medicine as needed.

What is epidural analgesia?

A tough membrane, called the dura, surrounds the nerves of the spinal column. Pain medicine is pumped into the space around the dura. The medicine seeps onto the nerves between the surgery site and the brain. Because it is blocking pain at a local level, less medicine is needed.

How does it work?

A very tiny tube, or catheter (KATH-et-er), is put in the space next to the dura during surgery. It is taped securely to your child's back and is connected to a pain medicine pump. There is a constant drip of pain medicine into the catheter. The medicine surrounds that part of the spinal column and bathes the nerves with medicine. Your child will also have a button to push to get pain medicine. When your child pushes the button, a computer pumps the medicine through the catheter. Other medication pumps may also be attached to the computer but pushing the button will not affect the other medicines.



Can my child get too much medicine?

No. The pump will only release a certain amount of medicine at a time. The doctor will order the amount of pain medicine your child will receive. The nurse will program the pump so that the medicine will be given at the correct rate. 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, he will not get too much medicine. Only your child or his nurse should push the button.

Are there any side effects?

The most common side effect of pain medicine is sleepiness. Your child may sleep more than usual after surgery. Sleep is the body's way of healing itself.

Some children may have tingling or numbness, mostly in their legs. This usually does not last long. A nurse will help your child the first time he gets out of bed to be sure he is stable. A change in the amount of medicine can lessen his numbness.

Other side effects can include:

- Upset stomach
- Vomiting
- Slow breathing
- Itching

Your child may be given other medicines to help with these problems. His medicine may be changed if the side effects are serious.

How long will my child have an epidural?

Children are usually on the PCEA pain medicine for two to five days after surgery. Your child's nurses and the Pain Service Team will talk with him to find out if he is getting more comfortable each day. If he is eating and drinking and his pain is under control, the pain medicine pump will be stopped. Pain medicine will be given by mouth. The epidural catheter will be removed after your child is doing well on pain medicine taken by mouth. A member of the Pain Service or his nurse will remove the catheter. It sometimes stings when the tape is taken off.

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 his pain. Sometimes they will use a scale with cartoon faces or numbers to help your child tell them how much pain he has.

Talk to the Pain Management Team

There are other ways to help the staff know that your child is in pain. If your child is restless, not eating, not sleeping, or crying, he may be in pain. Because you know your child best, tell your nurse if you think your child is in pain. The nurses will also watch your child for signs that he is uncomfortable. The nurses and Pain Service Team want to help your child be as comfortable as possible.

Encourage your child to press the button of his pain medicine pump whenever he feels pain. He should not wait until the pain is very strong. He should use the pump before doing things that may hurt, like coughing, moving, having bandages changed or physical therapy.

Primary Children's Hospital will work as a team with you and your child. Together, we can provide the best pain relief possible. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or the Pain Service Team if you have any questions.