



Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) for Labour

Patient information leaflet on remifentanil PCA for labour analgesia

Remifentanil is a type of opioid (the class of drugs which includes morphine) which has been identified as a safe and effective option of pain relief during labour.

Remifentanil is a fast-acting drug (approx. 60 seconds) and it is broken down in the body very quickly and reliably, meaning it does not accumulate in the unborn baby or in the mother. This means when administered on demand, the mother can time the effect with contraction pain. Although it is unlicensed for labour, remifentanil has a substantial body of evidence that supports its safe use for labour pain. Recent studies such as RESPITE have shown its superiority to pethidine. Such qualities make it ideal for use as a patient-controlled analgesia especially when epidural is not deemed safe or feasible. It is used in many centres across the UK and around the world and has been for many years.

Remifentanil is made up into a bag with a specific line going into a dedicated drip. The mother presses a button on demand and a pump measures a set amount to be administered. The pump has safety features including timed lock-outs to reduce the risk of overdose. This is known as a patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) system.

Information points for remifentanil PCA

- 1 in 10 women in the RESPITE study experienced low oxygen levels, therefore all mothers require oxygen supplementation via mask or nasal cannula when it is used. It can reduce the drive to breath (called apnoea) and make some patients drowsy so you will be monitored closely which is another important reason for supplemental oxygen administration.
- A separate intravenous cannula is needed for the PCA.
- Full monitoring including Cardiotocograph (CTG) which monitors fetal heart and uterine contractions during labour, oxygen saturations, electrocardiogram(ECG) and blood pressure is used with the PCA; the midwife will not leave the mother unattended while in use.
- An anaesthetist will check the appropriateness in your case and set up the PCA; they will answer any questions and ensure it is working properly before leaving.
- You have a button to press to give yourself the remifentanil; it is important that only you press the button and no one else.

- The machine has a safety mechanism. It will only give one dose every 2 minutes.
- Mobility may be possible after assessment. You may still have an early discharge after birth if there are no other problems and it does not accumulate in the unborn baby.

Advantages of Remifentanil PCA

- It works very quickly to provide you pain relief during labour but must be timed to work with contractions.
- It is removed by the body very quickly, so it has very few side effects for you and your baby.
- Breast feeding can be done at the earliest opportunity.
- You are in control of your pain relief.
- We offer this service on demand (assuming availability of pump and adequate staffing). It can be a good option if you have been told you cannot have an epidural.

Compared to a pethidine injection, with remifentanil you are:

- Less likely to need an epidural or birth with forceps or ventouse
- More likely to have a spontaneous vaginal birth

Risks associated with Remifentanil PCA

Risks	Mother	Baby
Drowsiness	+++	-
Itching	++	-
Sickness	++	-
Respiratory rate less than 8/min	++	-
May need extra oxygen	+	-

Effects on the baby:

- As far as we are aware there is very little effect on the baby.

Further Information

The Anaesthetist on Delivery Suite will happily discuss remifentanil PCA with you when you arrive and answer any questions you may have.

Accessibility

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