

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

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# Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) for women and birthing people during labour

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The aim of this leaflet is to explain the use of Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) as a method of pain relief in labour.

### What are the methods of pain relief in labour?

There are many different options for pain relief in labour which your midwife will discuss with you, but they include:

- Relaxation techniques, massaging and breathing exercises.
- Use of a birthing pool.
- Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) machine.
- Entonox (gas and air).
- Opioids – pethidine or diamorphine injections.
- Remifentanil PCA.
- Epidural.

### What is Remifentanil?

Remifentanil is a strong pain killer that belongs to the same group as opioids morphine and diamorphine. It works very quickly and wears off very quickly, so one advantage is that it can be timed with your contractions to help with the pain when it is at its strongest.

Like other opioids it can make you feel sick or dizzy and can slow down your breathing. These effects will go away within minutes because it wears off very quickly.

### What does it involve?

A Remifentanil pump is set up by the anaesthetist who will speak with you in more detail about using a Remifentanil PCA in labour. The pump is connected by a separate drip in the back of your hand or arm. When you feel a contraction starting, you press a button, and the pump gives you a measured dose of the medicine. The Remifentanil takes up to 20 seconds to reach its full effect, so timing the button pressing is important and can take a little practise. You will be continuously monitored by your midwife, who is trained in managing a Remifentanil PCA pump. Your midwife will not leave the room once the PCA has been commenced.

Remifentanil is a strong medicine and can slow your breathing and affect your oxygen levels. For this reason, you will need to be started on a small amount of oxygen through some nasal prongs and your oxygen levels monitored with an oxygen saturation probe on your finger. Your baby will also be monitored throughout your labour on a cardiotocograph (CTG) machine, which records baby's heartbeat.

Remifentanyl cannot be used in conjunction with any other opioid drugs. If you have had diamorphine during your labour, then you must wait for four hours before commencing on Remifentanyl PCA. You can still use Entonox in conjunction with Remifentanyl.

### **What are the benefits of Remifentanyl PCA?**

- It only takes a few minutes to set up and works very quickly.
- Many people find that it provides good pain relief in labour.
- The use of a button means you are completely in control of your pain relief.

### **What are the disadvantages of Remifentanyl PCA?**

- Unwanted effects include itching, nausea, sleepiness and reduced breathing. As mentioned above these effects are short lived.
- You will require an extra drip to be placed in the back of your hand/arm and additional monitoring as described above.

### **Further sources of information**

More information can be found on the following website: <https://www.labourpains.org/>

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)

Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### **Patient Experience Team (PET)**

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

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If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

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