

What is a remifentanil PCA?

Remifentanil is a strong pain relief medicine that can be used to help take away some of the pain in labour. It is given through a drip in your arm or hand. PCA means 'Patient Controlled Analgesia'. This means you are in control of how much you use.

You will be given a button connected to a machine which contains the drug. When you feel you need some more pain relief, you should press the button. The machine will give you a small dose into the vein. It works very quickly and also wears off very quickly. It can be particularly useful for those women who do not want or cannot have an epidural.

Who can use a remifentanil PCA?

Any woman in labour can request to use one, but it may not be suitable for everyone. An anaesthetist can talk to you about this.

How well does it work?

Remifentanil does not take away pain as well as an epidural but it is a helpful form of pain relief. Most women find it more effective than pethidine and find it useful to help cope with labour pain.

When can I ask for it?

You can ask for remifentanil once you are in established labour on the delivery unit. Your midwife will call the anaesthetist on duty who will come and speak to you about it and get the machine set up. Once the machine is ready it will start working straight away. It may take a little bit of time for the anaesthetist to adjust the drug dose so you get the right amount of drug for your labour pain. If the anaesthetist is busy looking after other patients you will need to wait for them to be available to help you.

How do I use it?

Once the machine is connected you are in control of when you get a dose of the pain killer. You do this by pressing the button given to you. The pain relieving effect is usually felt in 20 to 30 seconds and lasts for a few minutes. You should press the button when you start to feel the pain of a contraction. There is a safety feature in the machine that stops it from giving you too much.

Will remifentanil affect my baby?

As with most drugs, remifentanil is not licensed for use in pregnancy. However, when it is used for short periods, such as for labour pain, it is not thought to have any long lasting effects on babies. It may cause your baby to be a bit sleepy when they are first born, or be a little slow to take their first breath. This is a similar effect that is seen with pethidine, but lasts for a much shorter time.

Are there any side effects?

There are a few side effects you need to be aware of:

- It can make you a bit sleepy
- It might make you feel sick
- You might get itchy
- Lower levels of oxygen in your blood
 - This is seen in about 1 in 10 women and you will be given oxygen to breathe whilst the PCA is running. The midwife will monitor this carefully. Your oxygen levels will go back to normal within 20 minutes of stopping the PCA.
 - You will need to have your oxygen levels continuously monitored with a small probe on your finger

Can I still have an epidural?

If you try remifentanil and then decide you would prefer an epidural then ask your midwife to call the anaesthetist to talk to you about it. Having remifentanil first does not stop you from having an epidural later if you were assessed as suitable for an epidural previously.

Can I still use gas and air (Entonox)?

Yes. This can be particularly helpful whilst we are getting the dose of remifentanil right for you and you can use it in addition to a remifentanil PCA.

Useful resources:

- Coping with labour: Pain relief options for child-birth - <http://nationalwomenshealth.adhb.govt.nz/Portals/0/A%20to%20Z/A%20to%20F/C/C%20Coping%20with%20labour.pdf>
- Obstetric Anaesthetists' Association Information for Mothers - <http://www.labourpains.com>



Pain Relief in Labour - Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)

Tena koutou katoa, Kia orana, Talofa lava,
Malo e lelei, Fakaalofa lahi atu, Taloha Ni,
Ni Sa Bula Vinaka,
Greetings and Welcome to National Women's
Health

The National Women's Health website
www.nwhealthinfo.co.nz

Auckland District Health Board
National Women's Health