



Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA) for Labour and Birth

What is Remifentanil PCA?

Remifentanil is a strong morphine-like painkiller which provides pain relief during labour and is one of the options which you can discuss with your midwife. It is fast acting, has a short period of action and is broken down by the body very quickly again. This makes it a very suitable medication to reduce the pain during contractions in labour. Remifentanil is administered as a PCA (patient controlled analgesia) system. This means that you are in control of your pain relief.

When can I ask for Remifentanil PCA?

If you decide on Remifentanil PCA it can be requested any time after you have been allocated a room in delivery suite, and you are in established labour. The duty anaesthetist will come and talk to you to make sure Remifentanil is suitable and to answer any concerns that you may have. You cannot use the birthing pool if you are using Remifentanil PCA.

Who cannot use Remifentanil PCA?

Remifentanil PCA is suitable for most women to use for pain relief in labour. However there are some exceptions which may need to be discussed with the anaesthetist.

- If you are in pre-term labour ie. under 37 weeks
- If you have had Morphine in the last 4 hours
- If you are pregnant with twins, triplets
- If you have a history of reactions to morphine-like drugs.

If you have been diagnosed with pre-eclampsia, an alternative labour analgesia may be more appropriate for you.

If after starting Remifentanil PCA, your midwife and anaesthetist may advise an alternative analgesia and you may decide to change to another method of pain relief, then other options are still available to you.

How is Remifentanil PCA given?

In order to use Remifentanil you will need to have a small IV Cannula inserted into a vein usually in the back of your hand or arm. This is then connected to a pump which is controlled using a hand-held button. When you feel that a contraction is about to start, press the button. This causes the pump to deliver a small set dose of Remifentanil which starts to have an effect almost immediately.

It is crucial that ONLY YOU press the button when you require a dose of Remifentanyl. The pump has a built in safety feature to limit the amount of Remifentanyl that it can deliver. You are advised to remain in bed while using your Remifentanyl PCA.

Routine observations while using Remifentanyl PCA

Remifentanyl PCA is only offered to labouring women who are on delivery suite. As part of our routine observations you will have:

- Continuous measuring of the oxygen levels in your blood using a sensor on your finger
- Regular assessment of your level of sedation/ drowsiness
- Regular assessment of your level of pain
- One-to-one care and support from an assigned midwife.

Advantages of using Remifentanyl PCA

- You are in control of your pain relief
- Quick to set up and start. It requires an IV Cannula to be inserted and starts to have an effect with the first press of the button
- You can continue to use Remifentanyl right up to delivery and even afterwards for pain relief should you need sutures

- Once stopped, the drug is broken down very quickly and is safe for use in women who plan to breast feed their new-born baby
- You may use Entonox (Gas and Air) or TENS at any stage.

Unwanted side effects of Remifentanil

Remifentanil can have side effects similar to other morphine like drugs. If problems do occur they resolve quickly once you stop pressing the button.

- Nausea, vomiting and itch
- Drowsiness and some do not clearly remember their labour
- Slowed rate of breathing, and possible reduced levels of oxygen in your blood, requiring extra oxygen
- VERY rare side effects may include stopping breathing or a slow heart rate that require resuscitation measures.

Will using Remifentanyl PCA have any effects on my baby?

Remifentanyl has been used safely for labour pain relief in Northern Ireland for many years. As with most drugs it remains unlicensed for use during pregnancy. A small amount of the drug passes through the placenta, however this is rapidly broken down and has no harmful or lasting effects. There are no additional effects on the baby that are not already encountered with other morphine-like painkillers used for labour pain relief such as Morphine and Codeine.



To learn more visit

<https://belfasttrust.hscni.net/services/maternity/pregnancy-journey/labour-and-birth/>