

Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia

Information for consumers

Pain relief during labour

What is Remifentanil Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)?

Remifentanil is a morphine-like drug. It has been shown to be useful in reducing the severity of pain during labour. Its pain-relieving effect comes on very rapidly, and also wears off quickly afterwards. Although remifentanil cannot provide complete relief of pain during labour, many women find it helpful. A small dose of remifentanil is given into a drip in your arm at your request by pushing a button on an electronic pump.

Who can use Remifentanil?

- If you are in labour you can request to use remifentanil PCA. If you have an allergy to morphine, pethidine, or other related drugs or if you have severe heart or lung disease, you are advised not to use remifentanil.
- As the use of remifentanil during labour is not suitable for all women, the obstetric medical team will discuss any concerns around your suitability with you.
- If you cannot have an epidural you can try remifentanil.
- If you try remifentanil and then decide to change to another method of pain relief in labour (e.g. morphine, epidural), all the other options for pain relief are open to you. Having tried remifentanil does not limit your choice.

How is it given?

Remifentanil is given through a cannula (drip) placed in a vein, usually on the back of your hand or arm. The drip is connected to an electronic pump, which delivers a small dose of the drug once you press the hand-held button. The pain-relieving effect is usually felt within 20 to 30 seconds, and wears off again within a few minutes. You are in control and you get the drug when you need it and not in between contractions. There is a safety feature built into the pump so that you can only get a safe amount of the drug. You can use the pump at any time right up to your delivery if you wish, and the effects will still wear off very quickly when you stop using the button after your baby has been born.

Are there any unwanted effects of Remifentanil?

Some women can get sleepy between contractions. However, even if you are drowsy, this will wear off quickly after you stop using the pain relief. Remifentanil may also cause the oxygen level in your blood stream to fall. One in 10 women may experience this and may be required to have oxygen given. As part of our routine monitoring with remifentanil, your midwife will measure your oxygen level using a sensor (like a peg) on your finger. Your level of pain relief and drowsiness will also be monitored at regular intervals. Remifentanil has been shown to be safe for babies. Any side effects that are seen will be the same for similar medications such as morphine. Please discuss this with your midwife if you are concerned.

When can I ask for Remifentanil?

You can request remifentanil at any time during your labour. Your midwife will organise the pump set up. This may take a few minutes, but you will be able to use it immediately once you are given the button to push