Surgery and Anaesthetics Division

TENS Information

Pain Service

This leaflet is intended as a guide to help you gain the best from the trial of a TENS machine.

Please read the information carefully and don't be afraid to ask any questions.

Cautions

- You must not use a TENS machine if you are fitted with a pacemaker or have problems with your heart rhythms.
- You must not use a TENS machine if you are in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy.
- You must not use a TENS machine if you have or have had epilepsy.
- TENS electrodes must not be placed over broken, fragile or insensitive skin or over the front of the neck.
- TENS must not be switched on whilst driving or operating machinery.
- The TENS machine must not get wet and must never be used in the bath or shower.
- Please spend a little time reading this leaflet, it is intended to support the information you have been given by the health professional.

Will TENS cure my pain?

TENS or Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation, is not designed to be a cure for the pain but rather to give pain relief or soothe the pain. If you fall within the 80% or so of people who are helped by TENS, you will experience a reduction in pain. Don't expect your pain to disappear completely or you may be disappointed.

How do I feel pain?

The sensory part of pain involves a series of impulses being carried along nerve fibres in the limbs and body. The nerve fibres then enter the spinal cord and communicate with a further group of nerves which carry the pain signals up to the brain where the signal is converted into the sensation of pain.

Can the pain be reduced?

Yes. If in some way the impluses can be slowed or reduced, then the pain felt would also be reduced.

How will TENS reduce my pain?

When anyone bangs their head or elbow, they instinctively rub the sore part. This rubbing causes a great deal of activity in the thickest and fastest nerve fibres.

When this information reaches the spinal cord it is treated as “more important” than the painful impulses which are being carried by thinner and slower nerve fibres. The pain felt is therefore lessened.

TENS works in a very similar way in that it electronically stimulates the thicker, faster nerves, which then block some of the pain. TENS works by “electronically rubbing the pain better”.

Is this the only way that TENS can remove my pain?

No. TENS can also stimulate the body to produce its own pain-killing chemicals (endorphins or endogenous opioids). Again this is not a cure for pain but can give temporary pain relief and help in pain management.

Where do I put the electrodes?

When you are loaned a TENS machine you will be shown where to place the sticky electrodes which carry the current to the skin. The current will be felt as a tingling or pulsing sensation under the electrodes.

Do not apply electodes to broken skin or skin that does not have normal sensation.

Can I change the position of the electrodes?

Yes. The health professional will have suggested a position determined by your description of the pain, however, you may find another electrode position which gives you greater benefit.

Generally speaking the electrodes should be sited over or around the worst area of pain and must not be positioned touching each other.

Remember never to place electrodes over broken, fragile or insensitive skin or over the front of the neck or head.

Does my skin need any special care when I use TENS?

You must wash the area where the electrodes go at least once a day with soap and water, rinse and dry well. This is best done first thing in the morning before you position the electrodes.

Hairs need to be clipped away with scissors – don’t shave the area.

Can I use body lotions or creams where the electrodes go?

No. They will prevent the electrodes from sticking to your skin. They will also shorten the life of the electrode pad.

Do the electrodes need any special care?

Yes. When not in use stick them back on the plastic film supplied with them. Do not stick electrodes face to face as this will destroy them. If the electrodes lose some of their stickiness try moistening the surface with a couple of drops of water before returning them to the plastic film for the night.

How long do I use my TENS for each day?

Attach the lead wires to the machine and switch on at times of the day when the pain is at its worst. Ultimately you will discover how the TENS machine can best help you and you will incorporate its use into your daily routine. There are no hard and fast rules as to when you should use the TENS – your health professional may be able to help with suggestions based on how you describe your pain.

What will I feel?

Gradually increase the strength of the impulses until you can feel a comfortable tingling – the sensation should be strong enough that you can feel it all the time without having to think about it. After 10 minutes or so you may not be able to feel the tingling anymore. If this is the case, gradually increase the strength until you can feel a comfortable tingle again. You may need to turn the machine up a few times.

Should I stop taking my medication while I'm using the TENS?

No. Continue with your medication unless you have been directed otherwise.

Should I rest while I'm using my TENS?

No. The whole idea of making the TENS machine so small and portable is to allow you to move around and to help you regain your "normal" activity. The more you move, the more that pain will eventually be inhibited. You should aim to gradually increase your present level of everyday activity while ensuring that you pace yourself – don't overdo things at times when you feel better, just increase activity slowly.

Will I get better pain relief if I grit my teeth and turn the machine up high?

No. If you turn the machine up too high you may start to stimulate the nerves which carry the painful impulses or you may cause skin irritation. It is important that you only turn up the machine so that you can feel a strong but comfortable tingle.

What can I expect?

It may be up to 20 minutes before you experience any reduction in pain. When you switch the machine off it may give some continued pain relief for a period of time - this is called "carry over".

In some cases TENS may have to be used on a number of occasions before any effect is felt – please be patient and give it a really good trial. One of the reasons the TENS machine is loaned for two weeks is because it may not start to work for you straight away.

What do I do if my skin becomes sore when using TENS?

If you experience skin reaction to the electrodes, this could be either because you have had the machine on took long or too high, or you may be allergic to the adhesive coating. Hypoallergenic electrodes can be purchased if you find the TENS machine helpful.

You may need to move the position of the electrodes to allow the skin to recover you may also have to remove the electrodes between treatments. Please don't forget to phone the loan company directly if there is a problems with the machine.

How long can I keep the TENS for?

The trial lasts for two weeks. During this time you should use the TENS machine as you have been directed. Don't be afraid to experiment using it at different times of the day, with the electrodes in different positions and trying different patterns of electrical pulses.

At the end of the two week loan period it is your responsibility to pay or return the TENS machine to the loan company as directed on the agreement.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

Pain Service
Calderdale Royal Hospital

Telephone (01422) 224085

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obrat'te se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym fomacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਉਪਰੋਕਤ ਦਿਤਾ ਵਿੱਚ ਸਾਡੇ ਨਾਲ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

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براۓ مہربانی مندرجہ بالا شعبے میں ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

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