



Inpatient Pain Management Department

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

This leaflet aims to give you some information about a TENS machine and how it may be useful to you in managing your pain in the future whilst in hospital and at home.

Why do we have pain?

Pain is an unpleasant sensation. Everyone feels pain differently. The amount, or type of pain you feel, may not be the same as others feel, even if they have had the same operation or type of injury. Pain is a very personal feeling. It can be changed by things such as physical and emotional factors, culture and beliefs, previous pain experiences and mood.

What is a TENS?

A TENS machine is a small, battery-operated device that has leads connected to sticky pads called electrodes, which are then placed around your area of pain. It works in three ways:

- By blocking pain messages in the nervous system
- By helping your body to release natural painkillers
- By helping to relax tense muscles and promote increased movement of the body.

Will a TENS take my pain away?

A TENS may help with reducing your pain and promote activity and movement of your body which may have become limited due to short or long-term pain. If you have problems getting to sleep due to pain, it may be helpful before bedtime. It can be useful in combination with other interventions/therapies to aid with rehabilitation.

Is it safe for me to use a TENS?

A TENS is a safe machine with few side effects; however, if you are fitted with a cardiac pacemaker, are pregnant or have epilepsy, you should seek advice on its use from a healthcare professional. It is not advised that you use a TENS when operating heavy machinery, driving or in the bath/shower.

Benefits of TENS

- It is not addictive
- It is inexpensive
- It is safe to use
- It is effective for reducing pain and improving movement of the body.

When should I use a TENS?

- Use at work, home or in the natural environment
- Whilst walking, sitting or lying
- To relax at home
- To help with getting to sleep (not to use whilst sleeping)
- To go to social events
- To help 'flare-up' of pains
- To help with increased activity.

Where should I put the pads?

Make sure the machine is switched off before you attach the pads to your skin. Position the pads either side of the painful area, at least 2.5cm (1 inch) apart.

Never place the pads over:

- The front or sides of your neck
- Your temples
- Your mouth or eyes
- Your chest and upper back at the same time
- Irritated, infected or broken skin
- Numb areas
- Varicose veins.

To get the most benefit from TENS, it is important that the settings are adjusted correctly for you and your individual condition. Whilst in hospital this can be discussed and you would have the option of being loaned a machine as an inpatient. You may wish to purchase a TENS after discharge from hospital and advice can be given on where you may source one.

Useful Websites:

NHS, 2018, *TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation)* Available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/transcutaneous-electrical-nerve-stimulation-tens/>

About this leaflet:

Author: Daniel Hull, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Pain Management
Written: October 2021
Approved: November 2021
Review Date: November 2024
Edition: v1

If you have feedback regarding the accuracy of the information contained in this leaflet, or if you would like a list of references used to develop this leaflet, please email pals@dchft.nhs.uk



© 2021 Dorset County Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
Williams Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 2JY
www.dchft.nhs.uk