

# Pain Management in PACU Recovery Area

## What is the PACU?

After your procedure or operation, you will be taken to the **Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU)** for continued observation as you awake from anesthesia. Most patients in the PACU had procedures performed under general anesthesia, monitored anesthetic care, or spinal, epidural, and nerve blocks.

## Goals of the PACU

The goal of the PACU is to ensure you are comfortable, to manage pain, and control nausea.

The nurses in the PACU will monitor you closely and check your vital signs:

- temperature
- blood pressure
- heart rate and rhythm
- respiratory rate
- oxygen saturation levels
- pain management scale

The nurse will also monitor your surgical site, dressings, and any drains or tubes you have.

You may have an oxygen mask or a nasal cannula, which runs underneath your nostrils, to deliver extra oxygen.

Your surgeon, or a member of their team, will meet with your family in the waiting room to discuss your surgery and any changes to your care after surgery.

We will monitor you in the PACU until your vital signs have returned to your baseline.

When stable, we will transfer you to your hospital room or return you to the Ambulatory Surgical Center (ASC/3 West), where you will be prepared for discharge.

## How Will My Pain Be Managed?

When you reach a tolerable level of pain (in the PACU), you will:

- feel more comfortable while you begin to heal
- begin activities important for your recovery such as deep breathing and coughing exercises, sitting up in bed, walking, and returning to your activities of daily living

There are several treatment options for pain used in the PACU:

- IV injectable medication
- PCA (Patient Controlled Analgesia) for inpatients
- Spinal - given during your procedure

- Epidural - placed preoperatively for inpatients
- Local anesthesia given during your procedure
- Regional block (use of medication to temporarily freeze major nerves and cause numbness in a specific area)

Additional information on pain control methods:

- **Patient Controlled Analgesia (PCA)**

A PCA pump allows you to give your own safe and effective doses of pain medication when you need it. You can push the button as needed for pain control and before activities that you anticipate to be more painful. Your nurse will program the pump according to your doctor's orders. The pumps have built-in safety features. The total amount of pain medication you can give yourself is within a safe limit.

It is important for your safety that only **you** push your PCA button. **Family and friends are not allowed permitted to do so.**

- **Epidural Analgesia**

Epidural analgesia is sometimes used to manage pain after any major surgery below the chest area. A small line, like IV tubing, is placed in your back before the start of your procedure.

Local anesthetics (medications that cause numbness) and other medications are given through the line to provide pain relief in the area of surgery.

## **What is the Difference between Analgesia and Anesthesia?**

Analgesic drugs reduce or relieve the perception of pain but do not remove all sensation. Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and morphine are analgesics.

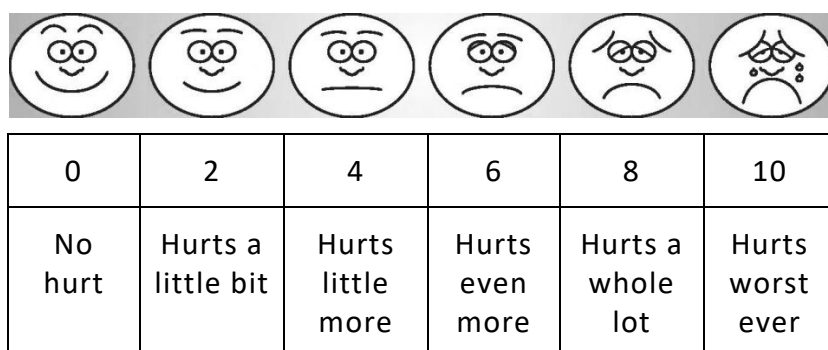
Anesthesia drugs create a complete lack of sensation (numbness) and the complete removal of pain. The novocain you get at the dentist is an anesthetic. Because anesthetics block signals to the nerves, the muscles in that area may be weak until the medication wears off.

Sometimes, the two types of medication are used together.

## **Monitoring Pain and its Treatment: Using the Pain Scale**

A pain scale is a helpful tool so you can describe how much pain you are feeling. Your doctor or nurse may ask you to rate your pain regularly.

Patterns in your scores help the health care team know if the medications ordered are working for you.



## How to Use the Numeric Pain Scale

1. Look at the pictures on the rating scale. On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 means “no pain” and 10 means “the worst possible pain”. The middle of the scale (around 5) describes “moderate pain”. The faces above the numbers are a visual aid to help you determine your pain level.
2. Pain includes many types of discomfort and can occur anywhere in your body. It can feel like a dull ache, or it can be severe and unbearable. Pain can include pulling, tightness, cramping, burning, stabbing, or other unpleasant sensations.
3. It is best to tell your health care team not only the number but also what kind of pain you are feeling. This information provides the team with a better understanding of how to manage your pain.

## Pain Management is Very Important to Your Recovery

It is possible you may or may not experience some discomfort during your hospital visit. To provide safe and effective pain management, it is important that we all work together as a team in your recovery. Good pain management will help you to feel better and improve recovery.

We look forward to answering any pain-related questions for your scheduled procedure. You will have the opportunity to speak with an anesthesiologist during your preoperative visit and the day of your procedure.

For additional pain related questions before your procedure, you may call the preoperative clinic at **716-845-1673**

Our goal is to make you as comfortable as possible the day of your surgery.