

TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation)

This leaflet explains what TENS is and outlines the risks and benefits of using a TENS machine to manage your pain.

Why am I having TENS and what are the benefits?

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation. It can be an effective way of managing pain on its own or when used with other ways of relieving pain.

The benefits are that you may find that your pain gradually lessens whilst using your TENS machine; it is safe to continue taking your normal medication while using TENS and you may find that you are able to reduce your painkillers depending on the amount of pain you have. You will also be able to carry on with everyday activities whilst using the TENS machine (apart from driving). If you get good pain relief you may even be able to increase your activity.

How does TENS work?

- The TENS is used to provide pain relief by blocking pain signals to the brain via the spinal cord and other nerve systems.
- By delivering electrical impulses to the nerves beneath the skin surface. These nerves are different than those dealing with pain and this more pleasant input into the brain tends to dampen down the degree of pain experienced. This is similar to rubbing a painful area of the body that has been knocked.
- It encourages the brain to increase the production of the body's own painkilling hormones known as endorphins.

What are the risks of using TENS machine?

There are times when you need to take special care.

- The machine should be kept dry at all times and should not be worn in a damp kitchen or bathroom.
- Do not drive or operate machinery while using TENS. A sudden change in stimulation may cause you to lose concentration.
- The pads should never be placed directly over the carotid arteries at the front of the neck or directly on the spine.

How will it feel?

An electrical impulse passes between two sticky pads which are placed on or near your area of pain. When in use, you may feel a “tingly”, “wave” or “throbbing” sensation depending on the setting of the machine.

Consultation

There is no need for you to be seen as an outpatient for follow-up of TENS suggestion by your doctor or nurse.

Who is *not* suitable for TENS?

TENS will not be suggested if:

- You have a pacemaker fitted
- You are pregnant
- You suffer from epilepsy
- You have severe numbness or loss of sensation within the pain area

If **any** of the above applies to you, **please tell the nurse**.

Important points to remember:

- **Never** wear the TENS machine in the bath or shower as it is an electrical device.
- Do not wear the TENS machine over broken, sore or infected skin as this may make it worse.
- **Do not** place the pads at the front of the neck, over your temples or over the heart.
- **Do not drive** or operate machinery while using your TENS machine.
- It is not advisable to sleep with the TENS machine on as you may accidentally knock the controls whilst you are asleep.

Any queries?

If you have any queries or concerns regarding using the TENS machine, please contact:

During working hours: Pain Management Unit 0118 322 8261.

Out of hours / weekends: please contact your GP or the out of hours service for advice.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Next review due: July 2024