



Transcutaneous Nerve Stimulation (TENS) – Patient Information

What is TENS?

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation and is a form of pain relief.

How does TENS work?

TENS is thought to relieve pain in two ways:

- by preventing pain signals from reaching the brain. It works in a way that's similar to rubbing a painful area to make it feel better. When the TENS machine is switched on it produces a pleasant tingling sensation which is believed to override the message of pain that is being sent to the brain
- it is also thought to stimulate the body to making its own pain killing chemicals

A TENS machine is approximately the size of a pack of cards and is battery operated. It can be attached to your belt or the waistband of your clothing. Electrode pads are attached to a TENS machine by insulated wires. When these electrodes are attached to the skin over an area of pain it produces a tingling sensation which can mask/ease the sensation of pain.

Advantages of TENS

TENS is a non-invasive, patient controlled form of pain relief that does not require the use of extra medication or pain injections.

Using your TENS machine

You will be seen at your first appointment by a Pain Nurse for approximately 60 minutes. You are welcome to bring a relative or friend with you.

The location and level of your pain will be assessed at this appointment. You will also be shown how to correctly operate a TENS machine, attach electrodes and care for your skin. You will be loaned a TENS machine for a trial period of four weeks. During this time you will become familiar with using a TENS machine and whether it is useful for your type of pain.

You will be given an appointment with the Pain Nurse at the end of the four week trial period. At this appointment the effectiveness of the TENS machine for your type of pain will be evaluated.



If the trial is successful you will be given information about continuing with TENS therapy and purchasing your own machine.

Guidelines for using a TENS machine

- your skin should be clean and dry (no powder or creams on skin where the electrodes are attached)
- plug the wires of the electrodes into the machine
- place electrodes on or around the painful area as demonstrated by the Pain Nurse (there should be at least a palm width between each electrode). Do not apply electrode pads over broken skin or sore areas
- secure electrodes to the skin with tape if required
- switch the TENS machine on. Slowly move the dial until you feel a tingling sensation. Increase the dial to a strength that can be tolerated for at least 40 minutes

Care of electrodes

- to remove an electrode grip the edge of the electrode and peel away from the skin
- keep electrodes inside plastic cover when not in use
- if an electrode loses its adhesiveness smear with water and place in a refrigerator
- electrodes should be stored in the fridge during hot weather
- discard electrode if it no longer sticks to the skin adequately

Precautions

- a TENS machine should not be used for a new or undiagnosed pain without consulting a doctor
- do not place electrodes over broken or irritated skin
- do not place electrodes on open wounds or burns
- do not place electrodes on the front of the neck or throat
- consult your doctor before using a TENS machine if you are pregnant
- a TENS machine should never be used by a patient with a pacemaker
- a TENS machine should not get wet (eg no showering or bathing while using a TENS machine)