

Patient information

## Department of Anaesthesia

# Remifentanil for pain relief in labour

Remifentanil is a pain-relieving drug similar to pethidine and diamorphine. It can help with the pain of labour and can be used in combination with Entonox. Many mothers find the pain relief it gives effective; some feel that it makes them feel more relaxed and less worried about the pain.

Remifentanil is used for those women who cannot have an epidural for medical reasons. These reasons might include having had some types of back surgery or having had a blood thinning injection (Clexane) in the last few hours.

We can discuss its use for you before you go into labour, but we cannot guarantee that remifentanil is available at all times. You might not be able to have the remifentanil if you have had any other opioids within 4 hours or if you have certain heart or chest disorders, including COVID-19 with symptoms.

## How does remifentanil work?

Remifentanil is given directly into a vein so that it starts to work quickly using a pump that you control yourself by pressing a button. This pump is called **PCIA – patient-controlled intravenous analgesia**. The anaesthetist will talk to you about this before setting up the PCIA.

Remifentanil PCIA allows you to give yourself small doses of remifentanil when you feel that you need them. It may take a few contractions to learn when to press the button, but once you do, you can aim to press the button with each contraction to make it bearable. You have control over the amount of remifentanil you use. For safety reasons, the PCIA limits how often you can take the remifentanil.

You may need to carry on using Entonox to control the pain.

You may experience sickness, sleepiness or itching while using remifentanil. Your body breaks down remifentanil very quickly, so the effects of each dose do not last long, and if you don't like it, you can stop using it, and all side effects will quickly wear off. Remifentanil is a strong



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painkiller which can slow down your breathing, so we will check your breathing with an oxygen sensor peg on your finger. You may need extra oxygen. About one in a hundred women using remifentanil PCA may have to stop using it because their breathing slows down too much. It is rare for slow breathing to be a serious problem.

Remifentanil PCA has very little effect on your baby. Just like after having pethidine, the monitor trace of the baby's heart can be less reactive and more difficult to interpret. Babies born very soon after the mother has used remifentanil can be slow to breathe properly and need help, though this effect is shorter with remifentanil than with pethidine.

## Reading more



As well as this information, there is good material on the <https://www.LabourPains.com> web site. We recommend that you go to look at this web site – go directly or use the QR code on the right.



If you would like to ask us anything, please telephone and ask for the anaesthetist.

Labour ward (24 hours): 024 7696 7333

## Further information

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact us on 024 7696 7333 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

### Document history

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