

## Maternity

# Remifentanil for pain relief in labour

Remifentanil is a pain-relieving drug like pethidine and diamorphine. It can help with the pain of labour and can be used with gas and air (Entonox). Many mothers say it makes them feel more relaxed and less worried about the pain.

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

We can discuss its use for you before you go into labour, but remifentanil isn't always available. You might not be able to use remifentanil if you had other opioids within 4 hours or have certain heart or chest disorders, including COVID-19 with symptoms.

## How does remifentanil work?

Remifentanil is given through a vein. It works very quickly. You control the medicine yourself by pressing a button on a machine called a pump. 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 you need them. It may take a few contractions to learn when to press the button, but once you do, you can 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 might need to continue using Entonox to control the pain.

You might feel sleepy, sick, sleepiness or itchy while using remifentanil. Your body breaks down remifentanil very quickly, so the effects of each dose do not last long, and if you do not like it, you can stop using it, and all side effects will quickly wear off.



## Patient Information

Because remifentanyl is a strong painkiller that can slow down your breathing, staff will check your breathing with an oxygen sensor peg on your finger. You may need extra oxygen. About one in a hundred women using remifentanyl 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.

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

## More information

You can find more information on the Labour Pains website:  
<https://www.LabourPains.org>



Go to the website directly or use the QR code on the right.

If you have questions, you can call the labour ward and ask to speak to the anaesthetist.

Labour ward (24 hours): 024 7696 7333

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.

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### Document history

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