



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

A Guide to Understanding TENS

(Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve
Stimulation)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:
Pain Management Co-ordinator, Pain Clinic
Tel: 01904 725395

The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

This leaflet has been produced by the Pain Management Team to explain TENS therapy.

What is TENS?

A TENS machine is a small battery operated machine that you can use to help with your pain management.

TENS is a method of providing small electrical pulses through the skin to stimulate nerves. This stops messages of pain reaching the pain centre in the brain. TENS can be used for the treatment of both chronic and acute pain.

How does TENS work?

The electrical pulses are transmitted through a set of wires. These are connected to a pair of sticky pads attached to the skin surface. The other ends of the wires are then fitted to a small plastic box powered by a battery.

TENS works by blocking pain signals travelling along nerves. It does this by stimulating other nerves that carry sensations such as touch and overrides the pain signal. The same thing happens when you bang your elbow and rub the injured area. The pain signals do not go away but you don't feel the pain as much.

Will you show me how to use TENS?

In your first appointment we will show you:

- How to position the pads
- How to switch the machine on and off
- How to adjust the settings

What conditions can TENS treat?

TENS may be able to help reduce pain and muscle spasms caused by a wide range of conditions including:

- ✓ arthritis
- ✓ period pain
- ✓ pelvic pain caused by endometriosis
- ✓ knee pain
- ✓ neck pain
- ✓ back pain
- ✓ sports injuries

It's also sometimes used as a method of pain relief during labour.

(The NHS Website 2019)

What are the benefits of having TENS Therapy?

TENS can be used as an alternative to taking medication.

There are little side effects.

What are the risks of having TENS Therapy?

For most people a TENS machine is safe and has no side effects.

A small number of people may be allergic to the electrodes and skin becomes red and irritated. There are hypoallergenic pads that can be purchased in this circumstance.

When should TENS not be used?

TENS should not be used in the following situations:

- × When driving a vehicle
- × When operating machinery
- × Whilst bathing or showering
- × On broken or numb areas of the skin
- × On the trunk or pelvis in the first trimester of pregnancy
- × If you have a Pacemaker
- × If you are unsure about using or are not able to use the machine safely

Individual conditions /concerns can be discussed at your appointment.

Please note that electrodes should not be put over the eyes or the front of the neck.

Finally

We will review how well the TENS machine is helping your pain management at your next chronic pain appointment.

Your TENS machine has a five year guarantee. Any faults are either fixed or returned to you or the machine is replaced.

If there is a fault, the TENS machine should be returned to the manufacturer. Their address and telephone number will be provided to you in the information that comes with your new TENS machine.

If you need replacement pads, batteries or leads you will need to buy these from the manufacturer's website or other supplier (as long as they are compatible with your machine). You cannot get these from us.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Cate Barry, Pain Specialist Nurse, Pain Management Service, 2nd Floor, Out Patient Department, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 725395 or email cate.barry@york.nhs.uk.

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PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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Owner	Cate Barry, Pain Specialist Nurse, York Pain Management Service
Date first issued	January 2010
Review Date	November 2024
Version	4 (reissued November 2021)
Approved by	Debbie Hunter, Clinical Nurse Specialist
Document Reference	PIL 437 v4.2
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