

Patient information

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

What is a TENS machine?

You have been recommended a Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) machine for your personal use. It is a small, lightweight, battery operated device which will easily clip onto your trousers or skirt allowing you to continue with your daily routine. The device works with two or more adhesive pads, which are placed surrounding the site of the pain or on the nerves supplying the 'pain area'.

How does it work?

Messages are carried from a painful area through nerves to the brain. TENS is thought to work by blocking the painful impulses in their pathway to the spinal cord, by stimulating nerves that carry the sensation of touch. Therefore, the use of TENS may help to alter the pain that you are experiencing. Other potential benefits may include easier mobilisation and a reduction in the amount of drugs required for pain relief.

Using the TENS machine

- The TENS machine requires a standard or rechargeable 9 volt battery.
- Always make sure the machine is switched off before starting.
- Make sure the selected skin area is clean, dry and the skin is not broken or numb. You should also refrain from using any body lotions, creams or talc to the selected area. The nurse will show you where the electrodes (pads) can be placed but usually they are placed on or around the site of pain.
- To reduce skin irritation it is advisable to slightly change where the pads (electrodes) are placed on your skin every 24 hours.
- When you commence using the TENS, check the settings on the machine. For your initial two week trial period we would recommend the following

settings: 'C' (continuous), and the pulse width and frequency at mid range (pulse width – between 100-200, and pulse rate – between 80-100).

- Connect the pads to the pins on the lead wire and position pads onto selected skin area, leaving at least three finger widths in between the pads. Ensuring TENS remains switched off, connect the lead wire to the TENS device.
- Switch the TENS machine ON (use dial immediately next to lead wire). Gradually increase the intensity (by turning dial in a clockwise direction), until you first experience a 'tingling' sensation.
- Slowly increase the intensity until the sensation felt is slightly uncomfortable, then reduce slightly. The sensation felt should always be strong, but comfortable. (The intensity should not be painful or cause muscle contraction).

Electrodes

The electrode pads are self-adhesive and should last for approximately 30 applications if reapplied to the plastic sheet between each use. A useful tip to renew 'stickiness' of the electrodes is to smear the sticky side of the pads with water, reapply to the plastic sheet and put them in a fridge for a few hours. Please remember not to use creams and powder under the electrodes.

How often should I wear it?

You may find that it can take up to 30 minutes to feel benefit / effects from TENS machine. There is no set length of time that TENS may be worn for, some literature suggests using the TENS for 1-1½ hrs at a time, 4 times per day, however you may find that you are wearing TENS for much of the day.

Initially, we would suggest starting slowly and then build up time gradually. Try to co-ordinate using TENS during the times when you are most active or experiencing worst pain. You may notice, however, that after a period of time you are not aware of the sensations from the TENS device. If this is the case, increase the intensity slightly. The sensation should **always** be **strong, but comfortable**. Please also be aware that if you alter settings on the machine, such as frequency, or modes (B,C,M) the intensity of the pulse felt will also change.

What happens when I stop using TENS?

Once the TENS machine has been switched off, you may continue to feel the effects for up to 30 minutes. You may also find after this time that the intensity of your pain has reduced.

Points to remember

- 1 Do not wear the TENS in the bath, shower or whilst swimming.
- 2 Do not use the TENS while driving or using machinery.
- 3 Do not use the TENS if you have broken, numb, sore or infected skin over the pain area.
- 4 Do not place pads on the front of the neck, near the eyes or anywhere internally.
- 5 Do not place pads around your heart. (***Please inform us if you have a pacemaker or problem with an irregular heartbeat.***)
- 6 Do not use TENS if you have epilepsy.
- 7 It is not advisable to sleep with the TENS machine on.
- 8 It is advisable not to use TENS when pregnant, unless under strict medical supervision.
- 9 If TENS pads are worn on the back, the intensity felt may be increased if sitting back in a chair (increasing contact to the skin).

Will I be able to move about?

Yes, it is important that you carry on your normal daily routine.

Does TENS work for everyone?

A significant number of people benefit from using it although not everyone finds TENS useful. Unfortunately, we are unable to predict who is likely to benefit the most.

Additional information

We suggest that you also read the instruction manual provided. If you have any further concerns or questions about the use of TENS please contact the Pain Service on 01284 712528 (answerphone) and we will return your call.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



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