

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 and works with two or more adhesive pads. Pads 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 2 x AAA batteries.
- 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 applied 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.
- 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 unit on by pressing the on/off button. We recommend the 'constant' mode is used with your initial trial of the TENS, the unit will automatically start up in this mode. Begin by pressing the CH1 + button, you will feel a tingling sensation, press CH2 +, you will now feel a sensation in both sets of pads.
- Intensity may be increased slightly by pressing the CH1 + & CH2 + buttons again.
- The timer key allows you to set your length of treatment.

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 coordinate 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**.

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 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).
10. Ensure the TENS machine is switched off prior to removal of pads.

Will I be able to move about?

A neck cord is supplied with your TENS to allow for easier mobilisation. 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 leaflet 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.

Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

Accessibility

If you require this leaflet in a different format, please contact the patient advice and liaison service on 01284 712555 or email PALS@wsh.nhs.uk

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