

# Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation - TENS

## Patient Information

Pain Service

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This leaflet aims to give you information about the use of a TENS machine.

## What is TENS trial?

TENS stands for Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation. It is used as a form of pain relief.

## How does TENS work?

It works on the same principle as rubbing a painful area after you have knocked it. The brain becomes aware of the touch sensation messages reaching it, which blocks or lessens the pain messages reaching the brain.

The TENS machine has small electrode pads which are placed on the skin over the painful area. The pads are connected by insulated wires to a small battery operated machine, which can be attached to a belt or the waistband of your clothes. The machine sends a small electrical current, which should produce a pleasant tingling sensation to mask the feeling of pain.

You will be taught how to operate the machine in order to help control the level of your pain.

## Benefit of TENS

TENS is not a cure but may help to reduce the level of your pain while the machine is turned on. When the electrical stimulation is stopped the pain will return. The effectiveness of TENS differs from person to person and may not necessarily help people with the same type of pain.

TENS is:

- Non-invasive (without the use of extra medication or injection therapy)
- Relatively cheap
- Patient controlled

## Advice

- **Do not** lend the TENS to other people
- **Do not** wear the TENS in the bath or shower
- **Do not** use the TENS machine during periods of strenuous activity
- **Do not** use over numb, broken, infected or inflamed skin.

- **Do not** use on the front or sides of your neck
- **Do not** drive or operate dangerous machinery with the TENS machine switched on.
- **Do not** use TENS if you are pregnant or have a pacemaker without specialist advice.
- **Avoid** applying the electrodes to the exact same spot every day.
- **Do** keep the TENS out of children's reach.
- **Do** check the skin for inflammation.
- **Do** use the TENS before the pain becomes severe, it will be more effective.
- **Do** place the electrodes a palm's width apart.
- **Do** continue with your usual medication.
- Later you will find that you may need less painkillers.

### **What happens at TENS trial?**

Your first appointment will be with the Pain Nurse Specialist and will last about half an hour. You are welcome to bring a relative or friend with you to the appointment as you may require assistance with the placement of the electrodes depending on the area of your pain if this is beyond your reach.

Your level of pain will be assessed, you will be shown how to apply the electrode pads, how to correctly use the TENS machine and care for your skin.

### **After TENS trial**

You will be loaned a TENS machine for a four week period, this is to allow time for you to use the machine regularly.

After four weeks you will be seen again by the Pain Nurse where the level of your pain and the effectiveness of the TENS trial will be assessed.

After the 4 weeks you will be asked to return the TENS machine and we can advise you on how to purchase one if required.

## Alternatives

Your pain specialist will have discussed alternatives with you in your consultation. These could be medicines, different injections or physical therapies. Every patient is unique and therefore specific alternatives cannot be given on an information leaflet as not all treatments are suitable for everyone.

## Contact information

If you have any problems please contact the Pain Management Team on:  
Telephone Number: **01942 773099**.

It is very important that you attend any appointments made for you with either, the Doctor; Nurse; Physiotherapist; Occupational therapist or the Psychologist. If you cannot attend please cancel the appointment and re-arrange, failure to cancel will result in discharge from the pain service and you will need to be re-referred by your GP if you wish to be seen again.

Please use this space to write notes/reminders.

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## Comments, Compliments or Complaints

The Patient Relations/Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Department provides confidential on the spot advice, information and support to patients, relatives, friends and carers.

## Contact Us

Tel: 01942 822376 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)

The Patient Relations/PALS Manager  
Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh NHS Foundation Trust  
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## Ask 3 Questions

Become more involved in decisions about your healthcare. You may be asked to make choices about your treatment. To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions:

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?



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## How We Use Your Information

For details on how we collect, use and store the information we hold about you, please take a look at our “how we use your information” leaflet which can be found on the Trust website: [https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient\\_information/leaflets](https://www.wwl.nhs.uk/patient_information/leaflets)

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This leaflet is also available in audio, large print, braille and other languages upon request. For more information please ask in department/ward.

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