

TENS – Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation

What is TENS?

TENS can be a very effective method of treating both chronic and acute painful conditions and is particularly effective with nerve pain. It is a safe non-invasive adjunct to other pain relieving methods, which can be easily self-administered. However, initial assessment, planning of the site for electrodes and treatment regime, must be carried out by a qualified therapist, or other health care professional, trained in the use of TENS.

Treatment periods can vary from 30 minutes minimum up to several hours and the person may be instructed to use either 2 or 4 pads depending on the range of the pain. In order to use TENS safely the person should:

- Have healthy intact skin.
- Skin sensation intact.
- Cognitive ability to cope with the equipment and treatment.
- Be able to place the pads on independently or access to a carer who can change the pads daily.

Contra indications

- Anyone with a pacemaker.
- Not to be used at the same time as a syringe driver.
- Do not use over a metal implant e.g. joint replacement.
- People with epilepsy should only use the TENS with caution.
- People who sweat excessively may not receive accurate treatment as there will not be even transmission through the pads and they may experience small 'shock' sensations

General guidelines for use

- The patient should have a careful assessment by a health care professional trained in the use of TENS, as accurate placement of the electrodes is vital.
- Squeeze some gel onto the flat side of one pad and press the two pads together so that the gel is spread evenly across both flat sides.
- NB modern pads are self adhesive and last for about one month.
- Put pads onto the area recommended by the assessor.
- Connect leads to the pads and the other end to the TENS machine.
- Switch on the machine and turn it up slowly until you feel a pulse.
- Use the machine for the amount of time prescribed and trial for at least three days to establish whether it will be useful in managing the pain.
- When treatment is finished turn off the machine and then remove the pads. Replace the pads onto the plastic sheet provided. DO NOT wash pads or the machinery as this leaves them unusable. If the self-adhesive pads lose their stickiness, putting one drop of water on them can renew this.
- Do not use the machine in the shower/bath.
- Pads must be removed daily.
- If the surface of the pad becomes pitted, they need to be replaced.

For further information contact:

- Hospital pain control clinic/specialist
- Physiotherapy department

■ Macmillan Nurses
