

GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulator)

Transcutaneous Nerve Stimulation for the treatment of chronic pain

TENS is an accepted form of pain relief that works for most people who try it. The TENS unit is a small battery powered machine that clips to a belt or fits in a pocket. Attached electrodes are placed on the skin at the defined area. When the TENS unit is switched on a tingling sensation is felt.

Contra-Indications

Please be aware of a few reasons when you should **not** use a TENS:

- If your pain is undiagnosed.
- If you are pregnant (unless the consultant or a specialist or Women's Health Physiotherapist says this is acceptable).
- If you have a cardiac pacemaker fitted.
- If the skin where the electrodes are to be placed is broken or fragile or has active shingles.
- Whilst operating machinery.

What is chronic pain?

Pain is deemed 'Chronic' if a person experiences pain beyond a few weeks. That is when pain continues beyond the time it usually takes the body to heal or for example the ongoing pain associated with wear and tear conditions, such as osteoarthritis.

How can TENS relieve this?

Pain messages are transmitted to the brain along **pain nerve fibers**. The brain also receives messages from other **sensory nerve fibers** e.g. warmth, touch, vibration.

If the sensory nerve fibers are stimulated e.g. a part of the body is rubbed, the amount of pain felt from that area is reduced (a mother will rub a child's knee better, for example, following a fall)

TENS machines use this principle (known as the pain gate theory) i.e. you feel the tingling of the TENS and it reduces the amount of pain felt. TENS machines also stimulate the production of substances in the body known as endorphins. These endorphins are our body's own natural pain killers, and therefore symptoms may be eased.

How to use a TENS machine

It is important to use the TENS machine properly to gain the most benefit. Seek professional advice. Some TENS machines are supplied with an instruction booklet.