



**St Margaret's**  
Hospice Care

# **TENS guidelines**

**Information for patients and carers**



## Introduction

TENS is an electrical method of treating pain. It works by transmitting an electrical pulse which can either 'block' the nerve signals that carry pain messages to the brain or stimulate the production of endorphins, the body's own pain relieving chemicals.

## To use TENS

1. Always make sure your skin is clean. Powder, creams or oils will stop the electrodes making a good contact with the skin, which is required to stimulate nerve endings.
2. Attach wires to the electrodes.
3. Place the electrodes on or around the painful area as shown by your therapist. Press the electrodes firmly onto skin.
4. Plug the wire firmly into machine.
5. Switch on

### Normal or constant setting:

Turn up slowly until you experience a tingling, pins and needles feeling. It should not be painful or uncomfortable but it is essential that the tingling feeling is present and preferably can be felt more than the pain. It will probably be necessary to turn it up after a few minutes if the tingling feeling fades (you may need to do this two or three times).

### Burst setting:

Turn up slowly until the muscle twitches (slightly not vigorously). First time users to 'burst' should begin with a low intensity and slowly increase the pulse strength over a period of 10-15 minutes until it is fairly strong.

### Modulated setting:

Turn up slowly until you can feel a gentle rise and fall of intensity of sensation under the electrodes. Adjust the pulse to give a strong but comfortable level.

## Length of stimulation with TENS

Your therapist will discuss this with you, but generally TENS is used for 1-1½ hours at a time initially. As you get used to using the TENS this can safely be increased to several hours of use depending on need. TENS can be used all day or overnight providing there is no skin irritation and you must have a 'TENS break' in each 24-hour period.

**Note:** Burst Mode - only use in 20-30 minute sessions.

## Care of electrodes

Between use, return the electrodes to the liner and store in a resealable bag at room temperature.

The life of electrodes will vary depending on skin conditions, storage, amount of use, type of stimulation and stimulation site. Usage may be extended by carefully moistening the gel surface with a few drops of tap water. Do not use too much water as this may reduce the life of the gel.

Do not pull on the lead wire when removing the electrodes from the release liner or the skin, as this may cause damage.

Your TENS unit uses disposable or rechargeable batteries.

## Precaution

Do not use on damaged/broken skin. Should a skin rash occur, discontinue use and contact your therapist.

Do not use on the left hand side of the front of your neck.

You must seek medical advice before using TENS if you:

- Have a heart pacemaker or have a history of heart problems
- Suffer with epilepsy
- Are pregnant

*cont.*

## Feedback - we welcome your compliments and complaints

We are keen to develop and improve our services and welcome positive and negative feedback, including any concerns you may have. You can:

- Speak to any member of the team either in person or over the phone by calling our 24-hour adviceline on **01823 333822** or **01935 709480**
- Email us at **feedback@st-margarets-hospice.org.uk** or through our website
- Formal complaints should be addressed to the Chief Executive

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Little Tarrat Lane, Yeovil, BA20 2HU

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Please note all incoming and outgoing calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes.

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