

Physiotherapy Team

Helping people to live well with pain

TENS Information Sheet

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS)

Instructions on how to use a TENS machine is taught by a specially trained TENS coach based at Whitegate Drive Health Centre.

Chronic Pain Service

Whitegate Drive Health Centre

150 Whitegate Dr, Blackpool FY3 9ES

Tel: 01253 955303

All patients attending this service have been assessed to ensure that TENS is safe and appropriate for them.

It is used as part of a broader treatment plan offered by the inter-disciplinary team which includes Doctors, Nurses, Physiotherapists and Clinical Psychologists.

What is a TENS machine?

A TENS machine is a small battery operated machine that is attached to the skin with adhesive pads and leads. It is not a cure but can give useful temporary pain relief in the same way as taking a pain killer relieves the pain for a few hours until it wears off.

How does a TENS machine work?

A TENS machine works in a similar way to heat, cold or massage. They all stimulate the skin in a way that the nervous system has evolved to prioritise over other sensations. These messages travel rapidly along super-fast nerves to the brain. These prioritised messages draw the brain's attention distracting it from pain. With TENS the skin is stimulated electrically which has the convenience of requiring only a small portable machine which is easy to adjust. As pain relief depends upon this skin stimulation once the machine is turned off its effect will soon wear off. The machine can be used repeatedly through the day so many patients report getting relief for a number of hours. Your TENS coach will advise you on exactly how it should be used to get the best effect.

How long does it take to work?

How quickly TENS gives pain relief varies between patients. Sometimes it is almost immediate while for others it can take up to 20 minutes

How do I use the machine?

Your TENS coach will explain exactly how to use your machine along with the manufacturer's instructions.

Helpful tips:

- Make sure the machine is turned off before attaching the pads
- Ensure the electrode pads are firmly attached to clean, dry, intact skin
- Place the pads at least 3cm apart
- Switch the machine on by turning the dials slowly until you achieve a strong but comfortable sensation

How do I take care of the adhesive electrode pads?

- When not in use put the pads on the plastic liner in a plastic bag in the fridge
- If the stickiness of the pads reduces with use try spreading a small amount of water over the gel. If this continues to be a problem they need replacing.

How do I look after the machine?

Avoid getting the machine wet – clean by wiping with a damp cloth

What do I need to replace?

The machine is on loan to you for as long as you require it. However batteries and pads will need replacing which you will have to purchase. Details of these are included with the machine and readily available at pharmacists and on-line

Are there any precautions

TENS is normally a very safe treatment. However here are some precautions you should be aware of:

- Do not use the machine if the skin becomes itchy or blistered.
- Do not place the pads over inflamed, infected, numb or damaged skin.
- Do not use the TENS machine when driving, operating machinery, cooking or when sleeping.
- Do not use the TENS machine in the bath or in the shower.
- Do not use the TENS machine on the front or sides of the neck.

What problems may I encounter?

Loose connections:

If the connection between the pad and the wire becomes loose, or the pad is not securely attached to the skin, electrical stimulation will be interrupted. With movement this may quickly reconnect causing as a sharp unpleasant jolt. **This will not harm you** but may make you jump. Check the leads and the pads for a good connection. If the problem persists they may need replacing.

Skin reaction to the pads:

Usually the pads cause no problems but occasionally patients notice red and itching skin.

Please contact your TENS coach if you notice this. There are hypo-allergenic pads available.

Reduced effect: Overtime the effect of TENS can diminish. It is important to take the breaks in usage advised. The machine can also be switch to a modulated mode (M) which varies the frequency of the stimulation reducing this habituation.

If you have any concerns about using your TENS machine please contact us and ask to speak to our TENS coach **Tel: 01253 955303**