

TENS

Transcutaneous electric nerve stimulation (TENS) is a pain management tool that your doctor has recommended to help you manage your pain.

A low intensity electric current is applied across the skin with electrodes. The placement of the electrodes is the most critical aspect of the use of TENS. A minor change in placement of the electrodes can sometimes mean the difference between pain relief and just plain irritation.

A typical TENS unit consists of the unit, self adhering electrodes, four lead wires and a carrying case. Sometimes a rechargeable battery is included and sometimes a standard 9 V battery is needed.

Application of TENS:

Clean the area where the electrodes will be placed removing any oil, dirt or lotion off the skin by using plain rubbing alcohol on a soft cloth or cotton ball. Examine the skin for any redness or rash. Do not apply electrodes to reddened areas of the skin.

Examine the electrodes to ensure that they are tacky enough to adhere to the skin. Self adhering electrodes may dry out or pick up dead skin particles both of which affect their adhesiveness. Electrodes should stick to the fingertip when lightly touched.

If the surface of the electrode appears dull and has lost its tackiness, it may need to be cleaned. Hold the electrode under a dripping faucet and rub it with your finger until the adhesive is slick or slimy to the touch. Place a paper towel (not Kleenex or toilet tissue) on a firm, flat surface and wipe the electrode across the paper towel one time. Lay the electrode face up on the towel and allow it to dry to the point it becomes tacky again.

Place the electrode as close as possible to the points that your therapist has determined are the most effective in relieving pain.

Plug the lead wires into the electrodes and into the TENS unit.

Turn the unit on and **slowly** increase the intensity until a gentle tingling is felt in the skin. Pain relief may be immediate or may take several minutes. However, the relief you receive should be the same as when you were instructed in the use of the unit by your therapist.

You should not experience muscle contraction or twitching in the area of the electrodes. If you do, the intensity of TENS is too high. Turn down the intensity until the twitching stops.

After a while, you will adapt to the stimulation and may no longer feel the electric current. If your pain is controlled, do not increase the intensity of the unit. The ideal would be that you do not feel pain and do not feel the TENS. However, you may increase the intensity if you no longer have the pain relief that you had when you could feel the stimulation.

Use TENS as needed throughout the day for pain relief. You should not use it at night however.

When removing the electrodes, roll them off the skin rather than pulling them off. Store the electrodes in a sealed plastic bag.

Contraindications for TENS:

1. **Do not use TENS if you have a pacemaker.**
2. **Do not use TENS if you have arrhythmia of the heart.**
3. **Do not use TENS in the shower or bath.**
4. **Do not use TENS on the eyes, ears, throat or genitals.**