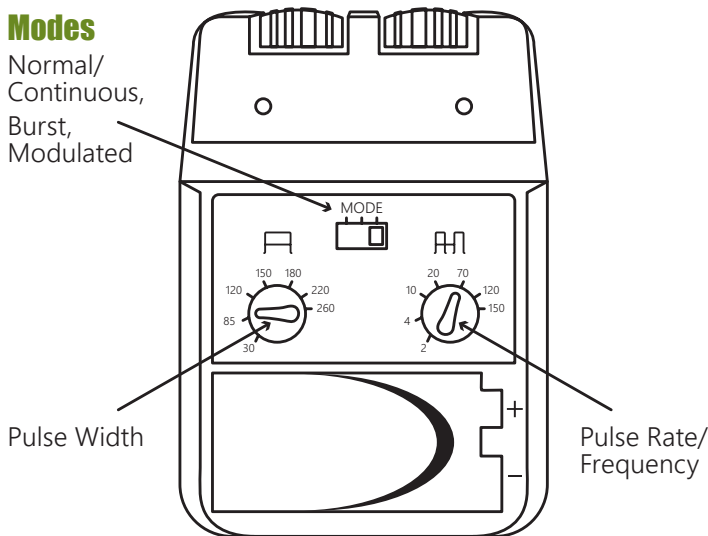




# Advice on Using a Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) Machine

## Modes

Normal/  
Continuous,  
Burst,  
Modulated



## Can TENS Machines be used by everybody?

TENS machines can be used by the majority of people, however there are some conditions/ illnesses where a TENS machine is not advised. We will not issue a TENS machine at Arthur Rank Hospice until a TENS Assessment is carried out to ensure its suitability and safety for you.

## How effective are TENS Machines?

TENS eases pain in approximately six out of ten people and the degree of pain reduction is variable from person to person.

## What is a TENS Machine?

Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (TENS) is an alternative method of pain relief and can be used in conjunction with medication. It is a small, portable battery-operated machine consisting of a control box, lead wires and electrodes ("sticky pads").

## How does it work?

TENS machines deliver small electrical impulses through the skin which may feel like small, tingling impulses. These small impulses try to block some of the pain signals, so that the brain receives fewer signals from the source of pain, so you should feel less pain. Depending on the setting used, the TENS will work to primarily block pain signals ("Pain-gate method" 90-130 Hz) or stimulate the body to make endorphins to ease the pain and block pain signals this way (2-5 Hz).

## How do you use a TENS Machine?

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions supplied with the machine. You may also find the following points helpful.

1. Before placing the electrode pads on the skin make sure the machine is switched off.
2. Make sure the skin where the pads are applied is clean, dry and there are no cuts grazes or areas of skin irritation.
3. Place the pads either side of the pain or where you have been advised by your healthcare professional. The pads should not be put within an inch (2-3 cm) of each other.
4. Set the pulse rate to the required setting (about 120 Hz is about right to start with).
5. Switch on the machine slowly and turn it up gradually until you feel a "tingling" sensation.

The sensation needs to be quite strong but not uncomfortable. After a few minutes the sensation may start to drop away slightly as it starts to work. This is called 'accommodation'. When this happens, turn the machine up slightly and then leave it for the rest of the time in use. Some machines have a modulation mode which means the pulses are variable and the body does not accommodate. You may need to make adjustments over several sessions to get the best settings.

6. At the end of the session turn the machine off and disconnect the electrodes from the machine. If you intend to use the TENS again later, there is no need to remove the electrode pads from the skin. Simply tuck the wires out of the way and carry on as normal.
7. Check that the pads do not irritate the skin. If the skin is red you may need to use a different type of pad. Persevere with the use of TENS. The effects are not always immediate, and the full effect may take several days. When you start to get good effect the carry-over effect of reduced pain may last for several hours and gradually the length of time the machine is used can be reduced.
8. When you have finished using the machine for the day carefully remove the pads from the skin and clean the skin with ordinary soap and water. Do not pull directly on the wires to remove the pads. If there is any redness or irritation from the pads, then the next time you use the machine use a different area of skin.

## Caution when using a TENS machine

- Only use TENS where you have been shown to use it
- Always adjust the intensity rate yourself to avoid it being turned up too quickly causing undue discomfort

## Do not

- Place electrode pads on broken or damaged skin or over the front or side of the neck close to the eyes or in the mouth
- Use over areas of reduced sensation
- Use in water such as in the bath or shower
- Use when driving or operating machinery

## How long should a TENS Machine be used for?

Use it for as long as you need it. Begin with short periods of 30-60 minutes, but you may find that you are wearing it for much of the day or night.

## Will I be able to move about?

The TENS can be clipped onto a waistband or put in your pocket and should not interfere with your movement.

## Contact us

If you have any concerns or queries, please contact your healthcare professional, or the Arthur Rank Hospice Therapy Team on **01223 675840**.

All information is correct at time of print and may be subject to change. Please visit our website for the most up-to-date information. If you have any feedback or would like this information in a different format or language, please contact us.