**Using a TENS Unit for Pain Management**

TENS uses a small electrical current to alleviate pain

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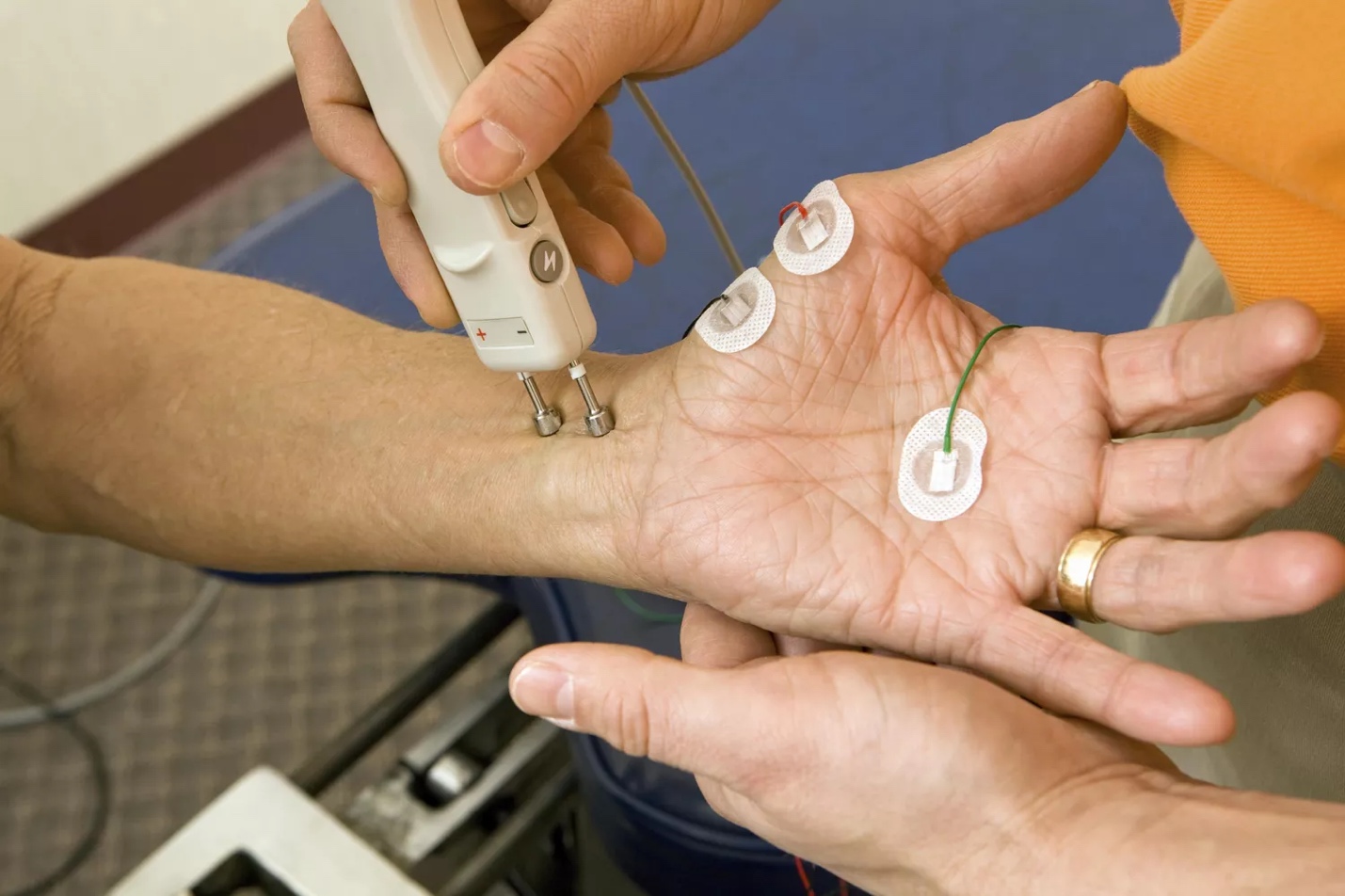
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A TENS (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation) unit is a small, battery-operated device that can help with pain management. The device has leads attached to adhesive pads called electrodes. The electrodes are placed on the skin near the painful area. It delivers mild electrical impulses that can be adjusted in frequency and intensity to help modify pain signals in your body.



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Benefits

The TENS unit is lightweight, making it easy to carry and use on the move. It can often be carried in your pocket or clipped to your belt.1

TENS is thought to disrupt the pain cycle by delivering a non-painful sensation to the nerves around the targeted site, reducing the pain signals going to the brain. The electrical impulses may also trigger the body to release endorphins, which act as natural painkillers.

Uses

TENS can be used to relieve chronic (long-term) and acute (short-term) pain and muscles cramps from various conditions, including:

* [Arthritis](https://www.verywellhealth.com/arthritis-treatment-options-189363)
* [Fibromyalgia](https://www.verywellhealth.com/a-tens-unit-for-fibromyalgia-pain-3973054)
* Knee pain
* Back pain
* Neck pain
* Diabetic neuropathy
* Pelvic pain from periods or endometriosis

Precautions

Ask your healthcare provider before using a TENS machine to make sure it’s safe for you. The treatment should not be used if you’re pregnant or if you have epilepsy, poor sensation, a heart problem, a pacemaker, or other electrical or metal implant in your body.1

TENS electrodes shouldn’t be placed on certain areas of the body, including:2

* Head
* Neck
* Mouth or eyes
* Chest and upper back at the same time
* Broken skin
* Tumors
* Numb areas

There is also a minor risk of skin irritation with TENS, particularly if you’re allergic to the adhesive pads.

Most people can use TENS units safely, but check with your healthcare provider to make sure that it's recommended for your condition. They can also help ensure that you're placing the electrodes correctly for maximum benefit.

Effectiveness

Researchers are still determining how effective TENS units are for reducing pain. A 2013 study found that TENS was effective in relieving pain for patients with fibromyalgia.3 In 2012, a study suggested that TENS may improve bone pain for cancer patients, but the results were inconclusive because of a limited number of randomized clinical trials.4

Research does suggest that some factors can impact the effectiveness. Varying the dose (intensity and frequency) of the TENS unit may help it be more effective so you don't develop a tolerance to it. You may also benefit by using the strongest intensity that's still comfortable. In addition, using the electrodes in areas that are acupuncture points may help to reduce pain.4

While further study is needed, TENS is considered a safe pain-relief option for many conditions because it’s non-invasive and doesn’t require medication, which sometimes causes adverse side effects.4 If you’re interested in trying a TENS unit for your pain, your healthcare provider may be able to refer you to a physical therapist, who can show you how to use the TENS unit for your particular condition.

A Word From Verywell

Some healthcare providers may offer TENS therapy in their office, or they can give you a prescription for using one at home. While you can buy a TENS unit without a prescription, your healthcare provider can help you decide if it’s right for you and how best to use it.