

Let's Talk About...

Advance Care Directives

An advance care directive is a legal document. It lets you find an agent and formally write your healthcare wishes. This protects you in case you can't speak for yourself because you're ill or injured. It also helps you tell others about these decisions.

An advance care directive is legal throughout the United States. However, advance care directive laws are a little different in different states. It's important to complete a form that follows the law in the state where you live or receive medical care. Anyone 18 and older can have an advance directive.

Depending on the form you use, an advance directive allows you to do one or both of the following:

Appoint a healthcare power of attorney (your agent)

- You can name a person you trust (who must be at least 18 years old) as your healthcare agent. This person can make healthcare decisions for you when you can't make decisions or speak for yourself. They can also speak for you if you're too ill or hurt to speak.
- It is important to talk to your agent about the healthcare you want.

Express your healthcare wishes (living will)

- You can record your healthcare wishes for the future. This includes choosing the kind of care and treatment you want or don't want in certain situations. If illness or injury prevent you from deciding or talking for yourself, the directive can guide your medical care. A living will helps ensure your wishes are honored.

How will an advance care directive benefit me and my family?

- It lets you tell people about medical treatments you want when you are unconscious or too ill to speak.
- It lets you choose people to speak for you and decide your medical care. They can help if you can't speak for yourself because you are too ill or hurt.
- It gives you peace of mind, because the person you trust will direct your care.

Creating an advance care directive is all about talking

Talking about these issues can be hard for anyone. It's up to you to express your wishes.

- Talk about your thoughts, concerns, and choices with your family and friends.
- Talk to your doctor about your treatment choices and the risks
- It's your right to accept or refuse any treatment or surgery. This even includes things keeping you alive, like a breathing machine or CPR. You can say you don't want these things or say when they should be stopped.
- Use an advance care directive. Write down the treatments you'd want if you could no longer speak for yourself.
- Choose a person you trust willing to speak for you if you can't speak for yourself. Appoint this person as your healthcare agent by finishing and signing the advance directive form. If you regain your ability to decide, your agent can't continue to act for you. You will make your own decisions then.
- You can get an advance directive packet from your Healthcare provider or ask for one at the hospital.

- Keep a copy of your advance care directive. Give photocopies of the signed originals to your family, friends, and doctors. Give a copy to the hospital when you are admitted for care. This makes your healthcare providers aware of your wishes so they can honor them.

Other information about advance care directives

Your doctors will follow your advance care directive if it is possible. An advance care directive remains in effect until you change it—and you can change it at any time. If you make a new advance care directive, it cancels the previous one.

Review your advance care directive every once in a while to make sure it still says what you want. If you want to change anything in an advance care directive once you've finished it, start a new form.

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