

Advance Directives

Advance directives are legal documents to tell your loved ones and your doctors about the medical treatment you would want if you are not able to speak for yourself. Because a severe illness or accident can happen at any time, all adults should have advance directives.

It is important to let your health care team know if you have advance directives, so they are aware of them and can honor your health care choices. You will be asked if you have advance directives if you are in the hospital.

Here are answers to some common questions about advance directives.

What is an Advance Directive?

An advance directive tells your doctors and other health care workers what types of care you would like to have if you become unable to make medical decisions. This may occur because you are:

- In a serious accident
- Very ill and near death
- In a coma
- Very confused or in late stages of dementia

In the United States, there are forms you can fill out to tell health care workers about the care you want. These forms are called:

- Health Care Power of Attorney (POA)
- Living Will
- Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Order

In some states, these forms may be combined.

What is a Health Care Power of Attorney?

This form allows you choose someone you trust to make health decisions if you are unable to do so yourself. You may also hear this called a medical power of attorney or health care proxy.

This person can be a spouse or partner, parent, friend, or someone you trust to make health decisions for you. You may also choose to have an alternate, in case the person is not able to fulfill the role. The doctor shares information about your condition and care with the person you choose.

- The doctor and other members of your health care team are not able to serve as your health care power of attorney.
- This is not the same as a power of attorney for financial decisions.

What is a Living Will?

A living will is a form that tells the type of medical treatment you want in certain situations. It only comes into effect if you are terminally ill or permanently unconscious, such as in a coma. In a living will, you can tell health care providers about the type of help you want or do not want, such as machines to help you breathe or feeding tubes if you cannot eat normally.

What is a DNR order?

A do not resuscitate (DNR) order is another type of advance directive, or it may be combined in the Living Will. It allows you to tell your doctors you do not want to have cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or other treatment to try to revive you if your heart stops or if you stop breathing.

When I fill out these forms, who do I give Advance Directive papers to?

Give a copy of these forms to your doctor. Give one to the person or people who will represent you. Tell health care providers and caregivers that you have an advance directive. It is also a good idea to have a copy with you if you need to go to the hospital for surgery or treatment.

How can I make or change my Advance Directive?

If you have questions or wish to put your choices in writing, tell your doctor or health care provider.

You can change or make a new advance directive at any time. Simply destroy the old one and complete a new form. Be sure to provide new copies to your doctors and to the person or people who will represent you.