

Learn about  
**Advance  
Medical  
Directives**



## What are advance medical directives?\*

They could be a living will or a durable power of attorney for health care (also called a health-care proxy). Either document allows you to give directions about your future medical care.

### It's your right

to accept or refuse medical care. Advance directives can protect this right if you ever become mentally or physically unable to choose or communicate your wishes due to an injury or illness.

\*Referred to more simply as "advance directives" in this booklet.



## Why learn about advance directives?

**Because they're valuable tools!**  
**Advance directives can help:**

### You

protect your right to make medical choices that can affect your life

### Your family

avoid the responsibility—and stress—of making difficult decisions

### Your physician

—by providing guidelines for your care.

### Please read:

Talk to your health-care provider! This booklet is not a substitute for the advice of a qualified health-care provider. This booklet contains general information about advance directives. Because laws and regulations vary from state to state and are subject to change, this booklet cannot take the place of legal counsel.

The photos in this booklet are of models. The models have no relation to the issues presented.



## All patients have rights.

### These include the right to:

#### Privacy

Your personal and medical information is confidential. Medical records and communications with your physician must be kept private.

#### Informed consent

Your physician must clearly explain the advantages and risks of any procedures, tests or treatments. You must give your permission for such care. You have the right to refuse any treatment.

#### Information about your condition

You must be kept up to date about your medical condition, treatments and chances for recovery.

#### Information about advance directives

In most cases, advance directives and your rights as a patient must be explained to you.

In some cases, the law may limit certain rights.



## Advance directives can protect people in extreme conditions.

### These people may be unable to communicate due to a condition such as:

#### Irreversible brain damage

or brain disease, which can affect their ability to think as well as communicate

#### Permanent coma

(or other unconscious states), which can leave them unconscious and without hope of recovery

#### Terminal illness

—a condition from which a person is expected to die within a short period of time. (These illnesses may lead to brain damage and loss of consciousness.)



## Advance directives can limit life-prolonging measures when there's little or no chance of recovery.

For example, advance directives may enable patients to make their feelings known about:



### Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)

—a set of emergency procedures used to try to restore circulation and breathing

### Artificial nutrition or hydration

—used to provide food or water through a tube placed in a vein, or in the stomach or small intestine

### Ventilators

—machines that support or take over breathing when patients are unable to breathe on their own

### Dialysis

—a method of cleaning patients' blood by machine, when kidneys no longer work properly.

Advance directives can also address your feelings about pain relief and comfort care.



## Understand the 2 types of advance directives.

### Living wills

These are written instructions that explain your wishes regarding health care if you are terminally ill or in a permanent coma, and are unable to communicate.

They're called "living" wills because they take effect while a patient is still alive.

### Durable power of attorney for health care

In a written document, you can name a person (called a proxy or agent) to make decisions for you if you become unable to do so.

Even if your state places legal limits on living wills, you may want one in addition to a durable power of attorney for health care. This may express your wishes as completely as possible. Your state may have special forms to use.



## Let your values be your guide when creating advance directives.

### Consider what's important to you.

Which of these statements express how you think you'd feel if you were near death?

### It's important for me to:

- die without pain and suffering
- be able to make my own decisions
- leave my family with good memories
- not burden my family with difficult decisions
- act according to my religious beliefs
- be with my loved ones at death.



### Consider the medical possibilities.

### Imagine yourself:

- in a coma (or other unconscious condition)
- with permanent brain damage
- terminally ill.

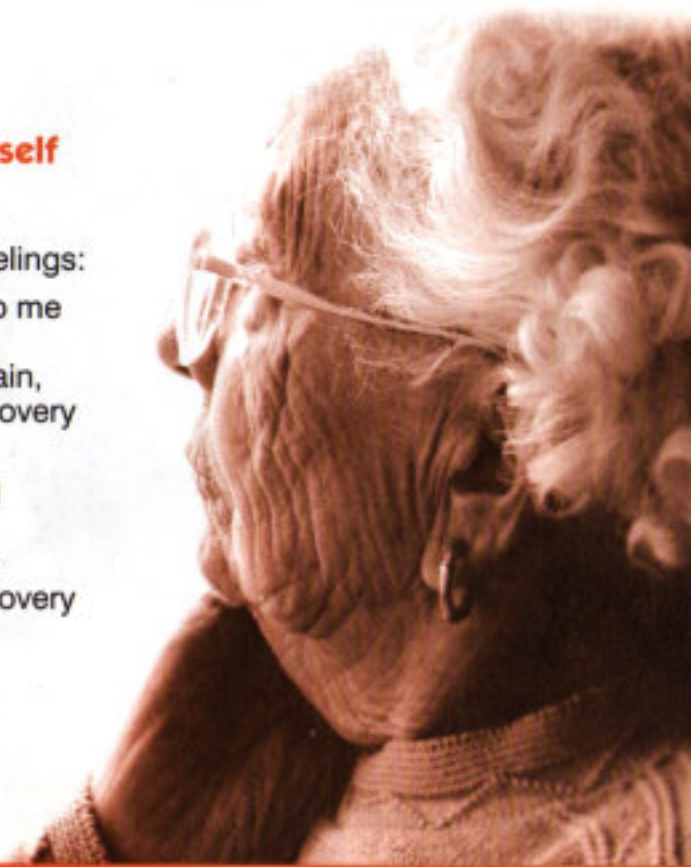
### Then—ask yourself

which of these statements best describes your feelings:

1. It is important to me to prolong life, regardless of pain, chances for recovery and cost.
2. I prefer to avoid life-prolonging measures if the chances for recovery are not good.

### Discuss your responses with your:

- family and friends
- physician
- religious leader
- lawyer.





## How do I create advance directives?

Here are some steps to follow:

### Check the laws in your state

regarding living wills and durable power of attorney for health care. It's a good idea to have both, if possible.

### Put your wishes in writing,

and be as specific as possible (forms may be available from the sources listed on page 14).

### Sign and date your advance directives

and have them witnessed and notarized, if necessary in your state.



### Keep a card in your wallet

stating that you have advance directives (and where to find them).

### Give your physician a copy

to be kept as part of your medical records.

If you use a durable power of attorney for health care, be sure to give a copy to your proxy.

### Discuss your advance directives

with your family, friends, physician and proxy. Give copies to a relative or friend who is likely to be notified in an emergency.



### Review your advance directives regularly,

and make changes as necessary. Inform your physician, family and proxy of any changes.



## Some special issues

### Do-not-resuscitate (DNR) orders

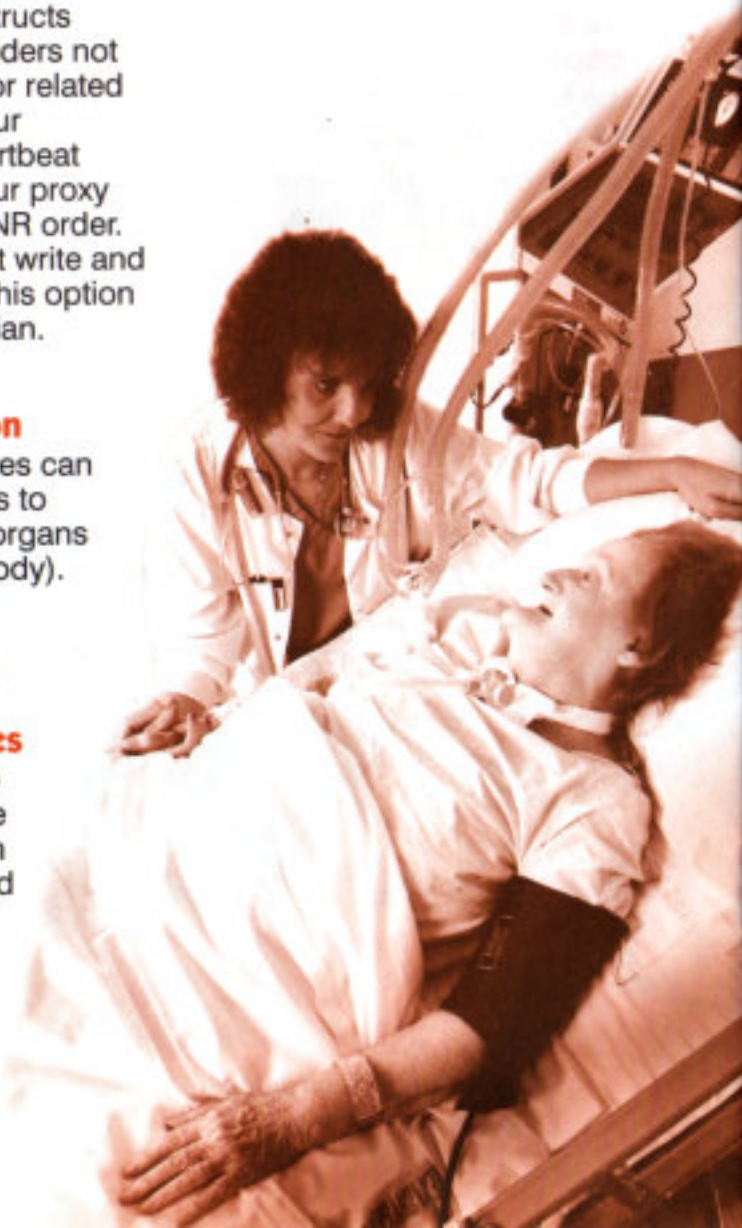
A DNR order instructs health-care providers not to attempt CPR or related procedures if your breathing or heartbeat stops. You or your proxy can request a DNR order. A physician must write and sign it. Discuss this option with your physician.

### Organ donation

Advance directives can state your wishes to donate specific organs (or your entire body).

### Other specific treatments and procedures

You may want to request or refuse procedures such as the ones listed on page 6.



## Some questions and answers

### Can I refuse treatment for my child?

You may in some cases, depending on a medical evaluation of the:

- child's condition
- chances of recovery
- expected effects of treatment.

### What if I change my mind after I fill out my advance directives?

If you are a competent adult, you can always change or cancel your advance directives. In some cases, you may even cancel them orally.

### My relative has valid advance directives—can I prevent them from taking effect?

Generally no, unless you can prove that the relative was not thinking clearly when he or she created them.



## Help and information are available.

If you need help in preparing advance directives, or if you'd like more information, contact:

### Local resources

These include:

- a lawyer
- hospitals, hospices, home health agencies and long-term care facilities
- your state attorney general's office.

### National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

[www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org)  
1-800-658-8898.



## Consider advance directives in your health-care planning!

### Know your rights

—and take steps to protect them.

### Discuss your wishes

with your family, proxy and physician.

### Review your advance directives

and make sure they express your wishes clearly.

Planning is the key to protecting your rights!



