

# Plan Today for Peace of Mind: Advance Care Directives



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All adults, regardless of age or health status, should have an Advance Directive. You do not need to work with an attorney to create your Advance Directive, but some states require that you sign the documents in the presence of one or more witnesses.

When you are ready to create your documents, there are several steps to take.

## **First, request or download the necessary forms for your state.**

In some states, living wills and healthcare powers of attorney are combined into one Advance Directive document.

You can download the free forms and instructions for your state from the AARP at [aarp.org/AdvanceDirectives](http://aarp.org/AdvanceDirectives)

## **Second, create your living will.**

- Here you will write down instructions that tell your family and healthcare team what you want done in case you have a serious injury or illness and are not able to speak for yourself.
- A living will only goes into effect when you are no longer able to make your own decisions.

## **Third, appoint a healthcare agent.**

- This person (sometimes known as a surrogate, attorney-in-fact or healthcare proxy) will make decisions on your behalf — through a healthcare power of attorney — and will use your Advance Directive as a guide to what decisions you would make if you could.
- You should select someone you trust, such as a close family member or good friend, who understands your wishes and feels comfortable making healthcare decisions for you. You should have ongoing conversations with this person to talk about your wishes at the end of life. Make sure your medical power of attorney feels comfortable and confident about the type of medical care you want to receive.
- Most state laws prevent your doctor or any professional caregiver from being assigned as your healthcare agent. You should also select a second agent as an alternate in case your first healthcare agent is unwilling or unable to serve.
- This document goes into effect when your physician declares that you are unable to make your own medical decisions. Until that time, your doctors will talk with you directly about your treatment choices, even if you have named an agent.



## Considerations of End-of-Life Decisions as You Prepare Your Advance Directive

Important decisions should be made around life-sustaining treatments. Life-sustaining treatments are specific medical procedures that support the body and keep a person alive when the body is not able to function on its own.

Making the decision about whether or not to have life-sustaining treatments can be difficult depending on your situation. You might want to accept life-sustaining treatments if they will help to restore normal functions and improve your condition. However, if you are faced with a serious life-limiting condition, you may not want to prolong your life with life-sustaining treatment.

### Share Your Plans

Once you and family members have discussed your healthcare priorities, it's important to discuss them with your physician and have the opportunity to ask questions.

In addition, one of the most important parts of making a living will or Advance Healthcare Directive is making sure others know where to find your document if it becomes necessary. The best way to do this is to give copies of your Advance Directive to your healthcare agent and to the doctors or healthcare facilities most likely to be treating you. You may also want to consider giving copies to trusted members of your immediate family and your closest friends.

### Do You Have Questions?

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