

## End-of-Life Care: Writing an Advance Directive



An advance directive is a statement of how medical care choices should be made and who should make them if you cannot speak for yourself. A durable power of attorney and a living will are types of advance directives. A durable power of attorney names someone to make decisions about your care. A living will is your statement of what you want your care to

be. Requirements for these legal forms vary. Check with your state bar association, state medical association, state nursing association, or local hospitals to find out what the requirements are in your state.

Aging With Dignity is an organization that helps you talk to others about the end of life. This organization offers a form called Five Wishes, which combines a living will and power of attorney into one form. You can find information at 1-888-5WISHES (1-888-594-7437) or [www.agingwithdignity.org](http://www.agingwithdignity.org).

It is best to make your living will when you feel well, you have time to think about these questions, and you can talk to your loved ones. It is difficult to make good decisions when you are very sick or if you have not shared your wishes with others.

### What to think about

Answering the following questions can help you think about what you want. Share your answers with your doctor and loved ones.

#### Write down your answers to these questions.

Who should make decisions about your care if you are no longer able to decide for yourself? (For example, your husband or wife, child, or doctor? Try to pick someone who would make the same decisions you would.)

What are you most afraid of having happen? (For example, you may be concerned about pain, loss of independence, being kept on life-support machines, or being a burden to your family.)

Think about your quality of life.

- Is living in your own home most important to you?
- Could you accept living in a hospital or nursing home? On life support?
- How important is it to be independent and in control of your own life?

**Write down your answers to these questions.**

How is your current health? If you have any medical problems, do they affect how well you can live your life as you wish?

Do you feel you know enough about these lifesaving treatments?

- CPR (used if your heart stops beating)
- Mechanical ventilation (used if you cannot breathe on your own)
- Kidney dialysis (used if your kidneys stop working)
- Feeding tube (used if you are unable to eat on your own) and IV fluids (used if you are unable to drink on your own)
- Antibiotics (used to treat an infection that could be life-threatening, such as pneumonia)

How do you feel about the use of these treatments if you:

- Are terminally ill?
- Are in an irreversible coma?
- Have a long-term disease that will not get better (for example, Alzheimer's disease)?

Do you want to die in a hospital, a hospice center, or in your own home?

Can you talk easily to your doctor? Do you feel comfortable talking about end-of-life issues?

Are you worried that you may not be able to practice certain religious rituals before you die?

Do you have religious beliefs that may affect the type of care you want?

Do you want to donate your organs when you die?

What other concerns do you have? Do you have any general comments about how you feel about illness, dying, and death?