

End-of-Life Care: Do I Want to Stop Life-Prolonging Treatment?



Making health decisions is part of life. These decisions can have a big effect on your health and happiness. Some decisions may affect how good your health care is. Others may affect how much it costs. Most people feel better about their health care when they take part in these decisions.

Making your wishes known ahead of time is especially important if you have a terminal illness. There may come a time when you can't speak for yourself. If that happens, your doctor and your family will know what kind of care you want.

This information will help you understand your choices. Your decision should be based on the medical facts as well as your own feelings. Talk to your doctor and loved ones about your wishes.

Your choices

- Stop treatment that prolongs your life. Instead, receive only treatment that focuses on your comfort and quality of life.
- Don't stop treatment that prolongs your life.

Key points in making your decision

- If there is a good chance that your illness can be cured or managed, your doctor may advise you to first try available treatments. If these don't work, then you might think about stopping treatment.
- If you stop treatment, you will still receive care that focuses on pain relief, comfort, and the quality of your life. This is called hospice care.
- A decision to stop treatment that keeps you alive doesn't have to be permanent. You can always change your mind if your health starts to improve.
- Even though treatment focuses on helping you live longer, it may cause side effects that can greatly affect your quality of life and your ability to spend time with your family and friends.
- If you still have personal goals that you want to pursue, you may want treatment that keeps you alive long enough to achieve them.

Reasons to continue life-prolonging treatment	Reasons to stop life-prolonging treatment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your illness is likely to be cured or controlled with medical treatment. You want curative treatment, and you are willing to deal with the possible side effects of the treatment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A cure for your illness is not likely, and you want care that eases your symptoms until death occurs. You do not want treatments that, though they may prolong your life, may have side effects that greatly decrease the quality of your life, or may shorten your life.

Circle the answers that best apply to you.			
I have a terminal illness, and I want treatment that may cure or control my illness.	Yes	No	Unsure
A cure for my illness is not likely, and I want care to ease my symptoms until I die.	Yes	No	Unsure
Medical treatments may cure my illness and prolong my life.	Yes	No	Unsure
I have other health problems that impact whether I choose curative treatment or end-of-life palliative care.	Yes	No	Unsure
I want support services, such as hospice, that are common with end-of-life palliative care.	Yes	No	Unsure
Cost is not a factor for me.	Yes	No	Unsure

Conclusion

By using what you have just learned, you will be able to make a better decision about life-prolonging treatment.

Learn the facts. Consider the risks and benefits. Ask about costs. Talk to your doctor. Talk to your loved ones.