

ADVANCE DIRECTIVES QUICK GUIDE

An advance directive is a legal document that outlines your wishes for end-of-life care if you are no longer able to make decisions for yourself. The directive consists of a living will and assignment of a durable power of attorney for health (also called a health care proxy). Here are a few things you should know about advance directives.

Do I Need Advance Directives?

Everyone should have advance directives. No matter your age or current health status, a serious illness or injury could leave you unable to make decisions for yourself.

Having your wishes documented ahead of time will ensure you get the care you would want and helps your family and healthcare team make medical decisions on your behalf.

Health Care Proxy

A health care proxy (also called power of attorney for health) is the person you choose to make decisions for you if you aren't able.

Even if you have a living will, it's really important to assign someone to act on your behalf.

Different states have different requirements for designating a health care proxy.

In general, you should choose a person who:

- Is comfortable and capable of discussing end-of-life issues with you.
- You trust to advocate for you if there are disagreements about your care with other family members or your healthcare team.
- You can rely on to carry out the directives in your living will.

Your proxy can be a spouse, family member or friend. You can also assign alternates.

Living Will

A living will is a legal, written document that tells your healthcare team, and family, what type of care you would, and would not want, if you are unable to make decisions for yourself.

By having a living will, you may avoid unnecessary suffering at the end of your life. You'll also relieve your loved ones of the burden of having to make all of the decisions for you (this is especially difficult in times of grief and stress).

Some folks opt to have very general instructions in their living will and some choose to be very specific. It's up to you and your family to decide what to include in your advance directives.

Some examples of things to address are your wishes regarding:

- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Mechanical ventilation
- Nutrition
- Medications
- Organ donation

Prudent Patient

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Do-Not-Resuscitate Order

If you have an illness or condition that is not going to improve, you can choose if you want a do-not-resuscitate (DNR) order. This is a medical order written by a doctor that lets the healthcare team know not to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) if your heart or breathing stops.

Tell your family and healthcare team your preference. A living will is not necessary for a doctor to write a DNR order.

A DNR order is only valid if you're in the hospital. If you do not want CPR outside of the hospital, you must get your doctor to write an 'out-of-hospital' DNR order.

POLST & MOLST

Like a DNR, a Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) is a medical order that outlines your specific wishes for end-of-life care. In some states, these orders are called Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (MOLST).

What's the difference in a POLST and your advance directives? The POLST is usually ordered by a physician when you are already seriously ill or at the end of your life. It complements, not replaces, your advance directives.

Go to the **National POLST Paradigm** to learn more about your state's POLST (or MOLST) orders.

What Else You Should Know:

- Review your advance directives periodically, and when there are changes in your condition, to make sure they are still in line with your wishes. Let your family and healthcare team know when you've made updates.
- Your advance directives never expire.
- Advance directives are legal documents. They become valid when you've signed them in front of a required witness. You can hire an attorney to help, but you don't have to.
- Advance directives are not honored if you are attended to by emergency medical technicians or paramedics. If called, they must stabilize you in an emergency.
- Your advance directives may not be valid in a state other than your own. Some states do honor interstate directives, while others do not.

Free Advance Directives Forms

AARP has free advance directives forms by state. **Click here** to find yours.

Get more free tools, guides and checklists at

www.prudentpatient.com