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# What You Need to Know About Informed Consent

Informed consent supports a person's right to make decisions about their own healthcare. It gives them the information needed to understand a specific medical or surgical procedure. They can then decide whether or not to have the procedure. In the U.S., informed consent laws vary from state to state. You can ask hospital staff for help if you need more information.



## Who will you talk to about informed consent?

The healthcare provider who is advising the treatment is usually the one to discuss informed consent. This discussion should take place before any treatment is scheduled. During the discussion, the provider will go over the advised treatment with you and the reasons for it. The provider must include information about likely risks or complications that can happen because of the treatment. Ask any questions you have at this time.

## What medical procedures need informed consent?

In each state, the procedures that require informed consent are different. Some common procedures that may need informed consent include surgery, anesthesia, and cancer treatment. The consent form expires in a set amount of time. You may need to sign more than 1 consent form before treatment.

## What should you expect to find on an informed consent form?

The following information should be included on a consent form:

- Person's name
- Date
- Description of the treatment or procedure

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- Possible risks or benefits associated with the treatment or procedure
  - Possible risks or benefits associated with refusing the treatment or procedure
  - Alternative choices to having the procedure (if any) and any associated risks or benefits
  - Place for the person or their legal guardian to acknowledge that they were given adequate information and the chance to have questions answered
  - Place for the person's or legal guardian's signature to accept the advised treatment

## **Who may sign the informed consent?**

For a consent to be valid, the person must be considered able to make decisions. The consent must also be voluntary:

- People younger than 18 are considered minors. They must have a parent or legal guardian sign their consent forms. The exception to this rule would be in the case of "emancipated minors." These are people younger than 18 who have the legal right to make their own healthcare decisions.
- People older than 18 are considered adults. They have the right to make their own healthcare decisions unless they can't because of impaired mental function.
- People older than 18 who are unable to make their own decisions must have an appointed guardian sign their consent forms.