

# What is an Advance Directive?

Today, many people are taking control of their futures by making sure their end-of-life healthcare wishes will be carried out.

*“Well, you want to have an advance directive because when you're able to tell the doctor what you want, it's very easy. You just tell them what you want. But there are a lot of instances where you're not able to communicate that directly to the doctor. And so in those circumstances, you want to have some mechanism for the doctor to know what your wishes are.”*

Two documents make up an advance directive. These are a living will and a healthcare power of attorney.

The living will details the kinds of end-of-life treatments you want if you can't speak or act on your own.

The Healthcare Power of Attorney document lets you choose a trusted friend or family member to make health decisions for you when you can't.

You may also want to talk with your healthcare provider about 2 other forms: a Physician's Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, or POLST, and a Do Not Resuscitate Order, or DNR.

A POLST form may be wanted if you are seriously ill and frail. It makes sure your end-of-life treatment choices are followed wherever you are.

A DNR is used when a person's heart stops or they stop breathing. In such an event, healthcare providers will not do CPR or take other steps to revive you. If you want a DNR, talk with your healthcare provider.

You can tell your loved ones or healthcare provider how you would like to be cared for. If your wishes are witnessed and documented, this is considered an Advance Directive.

You don't need a lawyer to write your advance directive. But you may find one helpful. Laws for advance directives vary from state to state.

Make sure your advance directive follows the laws in your state.

*“I think there's a lot of misconceptions in that people will say, Oh, I have a power of attorney, and then they really don't. They have a will or they will say, well, everything is going to my family. And they're thinking about financial issues. A power of attorney for health care and a living will are strictly for medical matters.”*

Your healthcare provider can also help you find the forms you need.

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Free, printable forms for your state may also be available online.

By putting your wishes in writing, you are taking steps to make sure you stay in control of your future – no matter what it holds.

Plus, your loved ones won't have to deal with the stress of making decisions about your care while you are sick.

*"The social worker here at the hospital encouraged us to do the advanced directives right away and to do power of attorney so that not if, but in our case when something happened I would know what Scott wanted me to do and I would be able to make those decisions for him."*

It's never too early to take control.

Anyone 18 or over can put their wishes in writing.

Do it now, well in advance of any life-threatening event or illness.