

# What is a Healthcare Power of Attorney?

One part of an Advance Directive is Healthcare Power of Attorney.

A healthcare power of attorney is a legal document. It names the person who you want to make healthcare decisions for you if you can't do so because of an accident or illness.

It is a good idea to choose someone you trust. This could be your spouse or partner, a family member, or a close friend. Choose someone who will always put your best interests first.

You may already have a regular power of attorney. This person takes care of your financial and estate decisions if you can't.

But a healthcare power of attorney is different.

The person you name as your healthcare power of attorney can make only healthcare decisions for you when you can't.

You can choose the same person for both or choose different people. It's up to you.

The person you choose as your healthcare power of attorney is called a "surrogate decision-maker."

*"By doing that, you've empowered that person to be the decision maker. You've eliminated the bickering because they may disagree and they may debate among them, but ultimately there's a judge and decision maker who you've named, and that person is going to ultimately make that decision. And most importantly, you've taken the doctors out of a position of being judges and lawyers and arbiters themselves."*

Each state has its own laws about who can be your surrogate decision-maker. So check to make sure the person you want to name will be recognized.

When making your choice, keep these things in mind:

Does the person live close enough to you so that they can be with you while you are ill?

Is the person 18 years or older and not your healthcare provider or an employee of your healthcare provider?

Carrying out your wishes can be stressful. Will your surrogate decision-maker be strong enough to carry out your decisions when other loved ones may not always agree?

Do you feel comfortable enough to talk about sensitive issues with this person?

Once you have decided on a surrogate decision-maker, talk to the person about your choice.

Tell them about your healthcare wishes. Make sure they understand what you want and are ready to act if the time comes.