



Advance Care Planning

Wishes for the Rest of Your Life

Have you thought about your wishes for your health care for the rest of your life? What if you were in a bad accident, or you became critically ill? Do your loved ones know your wishes if you are not able to make your own decisions or speak for yourself? Do your doctors know? Read on to learn about things to consider as you think about your care, and how you can talk to your loved ones about your wishes for your care at the end of life.

Be prepared

It can be hard to talk about serious illness, death and dying, but it is even harder to decide what to do if you have to make decisions about your own or your loved one's care in a crisis.

Having a plan that you share with your loved ones can be a gift to them, if and when you are not able to express your own wishes. If you have not shared your wishes and your loved ones have to make a decision in a crisis moment, it can be very hard for them to know what you want.

Parts of the plan

Some key parts of advance care planning include:

- Having someone to make decisions about your health care if you are no longer able to, called your **Health Care Power of Attorney**.
- Deciding what treatment you want or don't want if you are dying, called a **Living Will**.

The Health Care Power of Attorney and the Living Will are legal documents that are called Advance Directives. A link to the Ohio forms can be found on page 5 under "To Learn More".

Other parts of the plan should include:

- What you want your loved ones to know.
- What you need your doctors and other providers to know.

Also know that you always have the option to change your plan.

Getting started

What is most important to you in life? Do you have goals you want to accomplish? What are your values and beliefs about your health?

Read through this handout and think about some of the questions to help you think about your plan. Write down your responses.

Think about whether you want to talk to your doctor or others on your health care team about your current health and what you might expect if you are living with a chronic condition.

While you are able to make your own choices is the best time to make a plan. Come back to your plan as you have changes in your goals, values or your health, and make changes as you need.



Start the Conversation

Talk with your loved ones

Although many adults want to talk with their loved ones about end of life care, few of us do. It can be hard to start the conversation, but it is valuable and can be a gift to all involved.

Talking through your plan and wishes can guide your loved ones if and when they need to make decisions about your care.

Who, when and where

Think about the conversation.

- Who do you want to be involved in the conversation?
- When is a good time? Family gatherings, holidays when your family and friends are together can give many the chance to be part of the conversation.
- Where do you start the talk? Maybe at home, when walking, at a favorite restaurant, or riding in the car. Someplace that is comfortable.

Gather your thoughts

- Consider writing a letter to your family or friends.
- Have a practice conversation with a friend.
- You may find that you don't all agree on some things, and that is okay.
- Make a list of topics you want to talk about.

Ideas to start the conversation

Sharing a story or reading a letter can be good ways to get the talk started. Some other ideas to consider:

- "I have been thinking about how I want to live the rest of my life and I'd like to share that with you, and find out what your wishes would be."
- "I have been thinking about how _____ died and it made me realize..."
- "When _____ got sick and I needed to make decisions about (his or her) care, it was really hard because we had not talked about what (he or she) wanted. I don't want to put you in that position."

Do not be surprised if this first conversation turns into a series of talks over time.

About Me

Health conditions

Write down your health problems or conditions. You may want to ask your doctor or nurse to help you.

Health problems in my family that I am concerned about:

Based on what my doctor has told me and how I feel, I would say my health is:

Excellent Good Fair Declining Poor

How much information would you like to have about what is likely ahead with your illness?

- I want to know everything
- I want some information, but not “bad news”
- I want to know the big picture, but not details
- I do not want any information - tell my health care power of attorney

Things that are important to me

Life goals:

For now with my current health _____

For end of life _____

If I have a choice, I would prefer to die:

At home In the hospital or nursing home With my family

Other _____

For me, it is more important to:

Be comfortable and not be connected to any machines when I am dying.

Try all treatment that is likely to make me even a little better

Have everything possible done to keep my alive as long as possible. Even if it means I may be uncomfortable, away from my family and attached to machines.

Other _____

What makes life worth living for me? (Friends/family, religion, being independent, not being a burden, other) _____

To help me and my family and friends understand how my health may affect the things that matter to me, I need to ask my doctor these questions about any new treatment:

- What are the benefits for me?
- What are the risks for me?
- What are my options to having this treatment?
- What might I expect my life to look like if I take this treatment?
- What might I expect my like to look like if I do not take this treatment?

What if

In addition to thinking about your wishes, consider what you may be willing to accept or live with should something happen to you.

Physical limitations, such as not being able to walk or move on your own, not being able to talk, needing help to go to the bathroom, needing a wheelchair, or you need help to get out of bed. What would you want to be able to do?

Changes in your ability to think, remember, reason and understand. Things like being able to recognize and interact with family and friends.

Changes in senses, such as loss of taste, loss of sight, loss of hearing, or loss of feeling in your hands or feet.

You need more help with care. Maybe you can only go home if you have 24-hour care or maybe you need to be in a skilled nursing home.

Financial or other limitations.

Advance Directives

If you are not able to speak for yourself, advance directives tell your doctors and others providing care about the treatment you want when faced with a serious illness or unexpected accident.

These are legal forms that may vary from state to state. The 2 main forms are:

- Living will
- Health care power of attorney

If you decide to change your wishes, you can update these forms anytime.

Living will

A living will is a form that tells the type of medical treatment you want in certain situations. It only comes into effect if you are terminally ill or permanently unconscious.

Treatments that might allow you to live longer may include:

- CPR (Cardiopulmonary resuscitation) if your heart stops beating or you stop breathing. This would mean your chest is being pushed on over and over again to squeeze your heart and air would be blown into your lungs. Drugs may be given and electric shocks may be used to try to get your heart to beat on its own again.
- Feeding tubes, if you are no longer able to eat or drink on your own.
- Breathing machine called a ventilator that may be used with a breathing tube placed in through your mouth or neck to keep you breathing.

These are sometimes called life support measures because they may help your body heal until it is able to work on its own. But these treatments can also delay death, especially if you are older or have a serious illness or injury.

Health care power of attorney

This form lets your health care team know who you have chosen to speak for you if you are not able to speak for yourself. This person can be a spouse, partner, parent, adult child, friend, or other person you trust to make health decisions for you. The person you name may be called your advocate or agent in the form.

This person should know you well and care about you, and be willing to make difficult decisions about your care.

To learn more

- Talk to your doctor or others on your care team.
- Ask your doctor about talking to a **palliative care specialist**, especially if you have more than one chronic health problem.

You may also find these websites helpful:

- Ohio Advance Directives forms are available at: <https://ohiohospitals.org/OHA/media/Images/Membership%20Services/Energy/Choices-Advance-Directives-Packet.pdf>
- Prepare for Your Care at prepareforyourcare.org
- National Institute on Aging - <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/caregiving/advance-care-planning>
- Center for Practical Bioethics, Caring Conversations at <https://www.practicalbioethics.org/resources/caring-conversations>
- Five Wishes at: <https://fivewishes.org>
- National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization at <http://www.caringinfo.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3289>

Getting Affairs in Order

Share your wishes and goals with others

Talk to your loved ones and your care team about your plan for your health care. You can set up an appointment with your doctor to talk about your advance directives and your health. Many insurance plans will cover that type of visit.

If you make any changes to your plan, make sure to update your team. Review your plan every few years or if you have a new health problem or your health declines to be sure it still is what you want.

Give copies of your living will and health care power of attorney to your health care agent, other family members and your doctors.

Personal and financial records

Having various papers or records available can make it easier for someone to have what may be needed to take care of your finances, personal care or funeral. Think about setting up a **durable power of attorney**, naming a person to act on your behalf **for legal tasks when you are not able to do it yourself**. This is different than the Health Care Power of Attorney, but you may have the same person for both roles.

There are many lists of important papers that you might want to review, but your list may vary from someone else. Some things to consider:

- Birth certificate and certificates of marriage, divorce, citizenship or adoption
- Education and military records
- Names and addresses of family members, close friends, relatives, doctors, lawyers, and financial advisors
- List of medicines

Financial information should also be shared, especially if you have someone you identified as your durable power of attorney. It may also be good to have someone else you trust who knows where you keep your important papers and legal documents.

Financial information you should have available could include:

- Social security and Medicare or Medicaid information
- Sources of income and assets
- Insurance information with policy numbers, agent's name and phone number
- Bank accounts- banks location and account numbers for checking, savings, safe deposit box, credit unions
- Investment income and contact information
- Recent income tax returns
- Will - most recent version with signature
- Car title, deed for house or mortgage information
- Credit and debit card information

Key points

- Have copies of legal documents and other important papers in one place that is safe. If you put them in a safe deposit box, keep copies in a file at home.
- Tell a trusted person where your papers are located. This may be a family member, a friend, your durable power of attorney, or you may ask a lawyer.
- Talk to your doctors and your family about your end of life care.
- Give permission to your doctor or lawyer to talk to your family or caregivers as needed to talk about your care or bills.

Caregiver Resources

Planning for another

Talking about someone else's end of life plan can be harder if that person is not interested in that conversation. Letting your loved one know that it would be helpful to you so you know their life goals and the kinds of treatments they may want.

Be a good listener and try not to judge. Their plan may not be what you expect. Try to keep the conversation going and not too serious.

If the person refuses to have a conversation, try to write a letter. Maybe use a recent situation to let them know you would like to honor their wishes.

Take care of yourself

Caring for a loved one with health problems can be rewarding. At the same time, it can be hard to meet your own needs. Giving care to someone can be hard work. It is common to feel stressed and overwhelmed at times. You may feel too busy to think about your own health, but taking care of your body gives you strength. Care of yourself and your own well-being while caring for your loved one to reduce your risk for health problems.

Ask for help

- Ask others to be on your care giving team.
- When someone says, "Let me know how I can help" be ready to tell them what you need. These may include tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, yard work and child care.
- Seek support and tips from other caregivers.
- Find out about community resources that may offer help. Area Agency on Aging, churches, and organizations for specific diseases may have supports available.
- Talk to your loved one's doctor and others on the care team.

To learn more

Ask your doctor or others on your health care team about other patient education materials that may be helpful to you:

- **How to Ask for Help**
- **Coping in a Time of Major Life Change**
- **Tips for Preventing and Dealing with Caregiver Stress**
- **Internet Resources for Caregivers**

Another resource is called **Prepare to Care: A planning guide for families** is available at the AARP Caregiving Resource Center,

- www.arrp.org/caregiving
- Or call 877-333-5885

Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or health-info@osu.edu.

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