

# Advance Directive

## Information Sheet



### **What is an advance directive?**

An advance directive is a legal document that explains your medical care preferences in case you are no longer able to explain them yourself.

### **Why is an advance directive important?**

You may experience a serious accident, illness or find yourself in a coma. These events could leave you unable to communicate your medical preferences.

### **Are there different types of advance directives?**

There are two main types of advance directives, a living will and medical power of attorney.

### **What is a living will?**

A **living will** determines what type of medical care you want or do not want to receive if you are unable to communicate for yourself. These choices usually include life-sustaining care. The following decisions about types of care are usually included in a living will:

- Using life-sustaining equipment (dialysis machines, ventilators, respirators, etc.)
- “Do not resuscitate” (DNR) order – indicates that you don’t want to be revived if you stop breathing
- Use of a feeding tube
- Organ and tissue donation

### **What is a medical power of attorney?**

A **medical power of attorney** determines who can make decisions about your medical care if you are temporarily or permanently unable to communicate for yourself. You decide what person you want to make these choices. This person is usually someone who is close to you and who you could trust to carry out your wishes.

The doctor will determine whether you are able or unable to make your own decisions. If you are unable to make your own decisions, your medical power of attorney will decide for you.

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## When should I fill out an advance directive?

An advance directive should be filled out when you are healthy. Many people think you should fill out an advance directive only when you are aging and/or near the end of your life. However, you should fill out these documents while you are healthy. Making these choices when you are well can help reduce the burden on you and your loved ones later on.

It may be emotional or difficult, but you should talk to your loved ones about your decisions.

These forms are available on the Internet and may be available from your attorney, physician or hospital.

## What happens after I fill out an advance directive?

After you fill out an advance directive, you should:

- Discuss your decisions with your loved ones.
- Have your doctor review the document to make sure it is correctly filled out. Your doctor will then put it with your medical record.
- Continue to review the document and think about your choices.
- Keep a copy for your records. Your power of attorney should also keep a copy.



An advance directive is not permanent, you can change it. Over time, your choices may change. You should discuss your new choices with your loved ones and fill out a new advance directive as needed.

## Where can I get more information?

The National Cancer Institute provides accurate and up-to-date information about cancer types, prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment, survivorship and end of life care.

**Phone:** 1-800-4CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

**Website:** [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)



**Carbone Cancer Center**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN  
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH



**Cancer Health  
Disparities Initiative**

[ruralcancernetwork.org](http://ruralcancernetwork.org)

**For more local information, please contact:**

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