

# Selecting Your Healthcare Agent

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**Select a Person (and a Backup) To Be Your Healthcare Agent. This should be someone who:**

- Knows you well
- Is calm in a crisis
- Understands how you would make the decision if you were able
- Is not afraid to ask questions and advocate to doctors
- Can reassure and communicate with your family

A healthcare agent (surrogate or proxy) is someone you designate to make medical decisions for you if, at some future time, you are unable to make decisions yourself. Your agent can be a close relative or friend, but should be someone who knows you well and someone you trust. In most states, your agent can make decisions any time you lose the ability to make a medical decision, not just decisions about the end of life.

## **Talk With Your Healthcare Agent About Your Wishes**

Explain what you are asking of them and talk about why you picked them. Your healthcare agent needs to know about the quality of life that is important to you and when and what medical treatments you would want.

Talking to your agent means discussing values and quality-of-life issues as well as treatments and medical situations. Because situations could occur that you might not anticipate, your agent may need to base a decision on what he or she knows about your values and your views of what makes life worth living. These are not simple questions, and your views may change. For this reason, you need to talk to your agent in depth and over time.

## **Questions to help you talk with your healthcare agent:**

- Are there treatments you particularly want to receive or refuse?
- What are you afraid might happen if you can't make decisions for yourself?
- Do you have any particular fears or concerns about the medical treatments that you might receive? Under what circumstances?
- What are your views about artificial nutrition (food) and hydration (fluid)?
- If your heart stopped, under what circumstances would you want doctors to use CPR to try to resuscitate you?
- Would you want to receive treatments such as mechanical ventilation, antibiotics, or tube feeding for a time, but have them stopped if there was no improvement in your condition?
- Do you want to receive these types of treatment no matter what your medical condition? On a trial basis? Never?

Once you have selected your healthcare agent and discussed your wishes, complete your advance directive.