

End-of-Life Care: Do I Want Life Support?



Making health decisions is part of life. These decisions can have a big effect on your health and happiness. Some decisions may affect how good your health care is. Others may affect how much it costs. Most people feel better about their health care when they take part in these decisions.

Making your wishes known ahead of time is especially important if you have a terminal illness. There may come a time when you can't speak for yourself. If that happens, your doctor and your family will know what kind of care you want.

This information will help you understand your choices. Your decision should be based on the medical facts as well as your own feelings. Talk to your doctor and loved ones about your wishes.

Your choices

- You can have life-support treatment. Life support means any treatment to keep you alive. CPR is one type of life-support treatment. Being on a breathing machine called a ventilator is another type.
- You can decide not to have life-support treatment.
- You can choose to have life-support treatment only for a limited time or within certain limits. Many people and their families find that it is best to specify a point at which the treatment should stop.

Key points in making your decision

- If you have a terminal illness and other long-term health problems, you may feel that life support will only prolong your life and will not let you die naturally. Life support may not add to your quality of life. Or you may feel that you need to take every measure possible to stay alive.
- You may not want to have CPR or be on a ventilator. Or, you may want these treatments if there is a chance they might prolong your life so you can meet certain goals.

Reasons to have life support	Reasons not to have life support
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life support may help you return to your normal activities. • You need life support because of an emergency that is not related to your illness. • The benefits of life support outweigh the risks. • Your quality of life is good and you have a sudden event that requires life support. You could recover well from the event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have other long-term health problems that make it less likely that you will benefit from life support. • Life support will not help you return to your normal activities or to a level of activity you would like to have. • You want a calm, peaceful death, and you do not want to spend the rest of your life on a ventilator. • The risks of life support outweigh the benefits.

Circle the answers that best apply to you.								
I have a terminal illness, and I want life support to extend my life.	Yes	No	Unsure	I want a calm, peaceful death, and I do not want to spend the rest of my life on a ventilator.	Yes	No	Unsure	
Life support may extend my life and allow me to meet certain goals.	Yes	No	Unsure	The risks of life support outweigh the benefits.	Yes	No	Unsure	
If I am on a ventilator and cannot breathe on my own again, I am willing to live the rest of my life on a ventilator.	Yes	No	Unsure	I have other health problems that may impact whether I choose life-support treatment.	Yes	No	Unsure	

Learn the facts. Consider the risks and benefits. Ask about costs. Talk to your doctor. Talk to your loved ones.