

An advance directive is a legal document that includes instructions for medical care which go into effect if you are unable to speak for yourself. These documents are useful to have no matter your age. Here are some helpful tips that will help make sure you are prepared:



- The most common advance directives include:
 - **Living will** - legal document that outlines which common medical treatments or care you would want, which ones you would want to avoid, and under which conditions each of your choices applies
 - **Durable power of attorney for health care** - legal document that names a health care proxy, or someone who can make health care decisions for you if you are unable to communicate them yourself
- Make sure your plan is documented, either on paper or on video, and stored in a safe and accessible place
 - Discuss and share your plan with your family and health care provider so it doesn't get lost
- Advance directives don't expire - if you have any changes, create a new one and it will override the previous one
 - Review your advance directives periodically to ensure that they still reflect your wishes
- You do not need a lawyer to fill out an advance directive but requirements vary by state so make sure to check the [laws in your state](#)
 - Most often it will need to be signed in front of a witness
- Advance directives will vary depending on your stage of life
 - Even if you are healthy, it's important to state your general priorities in the event that something unexpected happens
 - If you have a chronic condition or a serious illness, you'll know more about your disease and its course and you can be a little more specific about your wants; if you have a serious illness, you may also want to complete a POLST (Portable Medical Orders, signed by a physician and specifies what treatments you want and don't want at the end of life)
 - If you know you don't have long, your advance directive will contain more information and nuance, but you'll want a POLST as well

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- Emergency medical technicians cannot honor advance directives, but they can honor POLSTs and DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) orders. Without a POLST or a DNR, emergency personnel must do what is necessary to stabilize a person for transfer to a hospital and, then, advance directives can be implemented after they are evaluated by a physician.
 - If you do not have an advance directive and are unable to speak for yourself, state laws will determine who can make a medical decision on your behalf (typically your spouse, your parents, your children, or possibly a close friend or a physician)
 - You can contact your State Attorney General's Office, your [local Area Agency on Aging](#), AARP or your [local Veteran's Affairs office](#) if you're a veteran to find advance directive forms for your state
 - o There are also some organizations that allow you to create, download, and print your forms online but make sure these websites are secure and the forms are legally recognized in your state before sharing any personal information