

Manage

Making Your Wishes Known with Advance Directives

No one likes to think about being incapacitated or unable to make decisions about medical care. But it could happen; so it's best to be prepared. The best way to make your wishes known is by having legal documents — called *advance directives* — that will speak for you. Here's what you may need.

Living Wills

Basically, a living will speaks for you when you are unable to do so. Usually, the purpose of a living will is to express your desire not to receive extraordinary medical treatment. You determine the kind of medical care you want under the circumstances you describe. You should express your wishes in as much detail as possible so that medical-care providers will be able to clearly understand your intent.

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For instance, you might specify that you would not want “artificial feeding,” and you should explain what you mean by

“terminal.” In some states, a living will is effective only if you've been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Your living will may not be effective if you suffer a stroke or are in a coma and your condition isn't considered terminal.

Durable Powers of Attorney for Health Care

A durable power of attorney for health care — sometimes called a health care proxy — designates someone else to make decisions for you if you are unable to make those decisions yourself. The scope of a durable power of attorney generally goes beyond that of a living will. While a living will usually is concerned with the withdrawal or withholding of life-support treatment in the event you become terminally ill, a durable power of attorney for health care can address nearly any health decision.

Your attorney can draw up the appropriate documents.

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