

Completing an Advance Health Care Directive

What is an Advance Health Care Directive?

An advance health care directive is a legal document. It will allow you to write down your wishes about medical care so that your doctor, family members and other loved ones know how to care for you in case you are unable to make health care decisions for yourself. Advance directive means either an individual health care instruction or a power of attorney for health care. You may be more familiar with the term "durable power of attorney for health care" or a "living will." The advance health care directive can be used when you are no longer able to make decisions about your health care for yourself. It only covers health decisions. It does not cover financial decisions. We recommend that you fill out an advance health care directive form. (See page 2 for information on how to get the form at no cost from Kaiser Permanente.)

Why is it important to complete an Advance Health Care Directive?

Completing an advance health care directive form allows you to appoint someone you trust who can make health care decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so. By writing down your views about life support and your wishes about medical care, the person you choose will know your wishes about your care and communicate your wishes concerning your care to medical personnel.

Who should I ask to represent me?

Before completing an advance health care directive it is important to think about who you are going to ask to serve as your representative or health care agent. This person must be at least 18 years of age. You may choose a family member, a good friend, or perhaps your spiritual leader or guide. Of course, he or she should be someone that you trust to represent your views in the event you are unable to make decisions about your care. But your spokesperson should also be someone who is able to communicate clearly and assertively with medical personnel about your wishes for your care. If possible, he or she should be someone who lives near you and is also unlikely to pass away before you do.

Tips on Getting Started:

- Arrange a meeting with your loved ones so that you can talk about your views on medical care and life support.
- Discuss whether it's important for you to maintain independence and to be able to do things for yourself if you should become gravely ill.
- Discuss your beliefs about illness and the dying process, such as how important it is for you to be comfortable, not to feel pain, or to have family members and/or friends with you at the end of life.

This kind of conversation will help your loved ones know what your personal views are. Talking about it will also help you fill out your form. These legal forms are easy to fill out and do not require a lawyer. However, the form will need to be witnessed or notarized.

Where can I get the Advance Health Care Directive form?

You can pick up a copy of our Kaiser Permanente advance health care directive packet at no cost in the Health Education Center at any Kaiser Permanente facility. You can also download and print copies of the form or the entire packet at your doctor's Home Page at kp.org/mydoctor if you are a Kaiser Permanente member in Northern California. On your doctor's Home Page go to the Health Information and Resources section on the left navigation bar, then click "advance care planning."

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Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.