

# What you should know about VENTILATORS

## What are ventilators?

Ventilators are often referred to as “breathing machines” or “life support.” They are machines that breathe for you when you are unable to take in air on your own. When a person is placed on a ventilator, a tube is inserted into their windpipe, either through their mouth, or through a hole in their throat called a tracheostomy, and connected to a machine that pumps air into their lungs.

## What are the benefits?

Ventilators are commonly used to breathe for patients during surgery, and for short-term treatment of illnesses such as pneumonia. Ventilation allows the body to rest while it recovers from injury or infection.

## What are the risks?

A person on a ventilator cannot speak or eat, and the tube in their throat can be uncomfortable. This can cause them to become anxious and attempt to pull the tube out. They may have their hands tied down or be given medication to prevent this from happening.

Ventilators do not usually benefit people who are frail or have a terminal illness. A person who is too weak, or has an illness that is very advanced, may never be able to breathe on their own again.

## What does this mean for me?

You should know that you have the right to decide not to start ventilator treatment in cases where ventilation may prevent you from experiencing a peaceful, natural death. If you are placed on a ventilator, your remaining time will likely be spent in a medical facility, and your family may be faced with tough decisions regarding your care. Sometimes placing a patient on a ventilator helps families cope by allowing them to spend more time with their loved one, but knowing the right time to end ventilation and choosing to stop it can be difficult for them.

## Do I have a choice?

Yes. You have the right to control your own health care decisions. If you want to use a ventilator to help you breathe, you should think about specific instances when you will and will not want one used. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and doctor.

This brochure was designed to give a general description of ventilators, some pros and cons of their use, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want a ventilator to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.

***Ventilators allow the body to rest while it recovers from injury or infection. Many people are able to breathe on their own after a period of ventilator use, but ventilator treatment does not usually benefit those who are frail or have a terminal illness.***



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## What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a thoughtful process used to plan for future healthcare choices. It involves personal reflection and discussions with loved ones and healthcare providers. Your plan should include both a Living Will and the designation of a Healthcare Surrogate who can make decisions on your behalf if you're unable to speak for yourself.

The best time to think and talk about future medical decisions is when you are *well*, rather than in a time of medical crisis.

## Why should I have an Advance Care Plan?

Advances in medicine and technology have given us the ability to sustain life through artificial or mechanical interventions. In cases where patients are terminally ill with no hope of recovery, these interventions can prolong the dying process and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

By establishing an Advance Care Plan while you are well, you can make sure that your wishes are honored later, should you become unable to speak for yourself.

## Does an Advance Care Plan encourage my death?

**NO.** You are not signing an agreement that says that you wish to die. You are making a choice for the future, about the kind of medical treatment you wish to receive when there is little or no hope for recovery.

### Advance Care Planning Helps:

**YOU** make treatment decisions that can affect your life.

**YOUR FAMILY** have peace of mind knowing your decisions.

**YOUR PHYSICIAN** by providing information about the kind of care you want.

## How can Empath Choices for Care help me?

Empath Choices for Care provides advance care planning services, free of charge, to anyone who wishes to communicate their future medical treatment decisions. Our living will is used by many hospital systems across the country. It is acceptable to doctors and easily understood by the public.

Empath Choices for Care is a program of Empath Health that was established through a partnership of physicians, elder care providers and community citizens. Our focus is providing holistic and compassionate advance care planning that respects human dignity, as well as each individual's best interests and personal wishes.



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