

# Tips for Talking With Your Doctor About Advance Care Planning

Talking with a doctor about advance care planning is covered by Medicare as part of your annual wellness visit. If you have private health insurance, check with your insurance provider. When you are ready to talk to your doctor, these tips and conversation starters can help you make the most out of your visit. You will also find examples of questions you might ask during your appointment. You may decide that not all the questions are important to you. Or you may not be ready to talk about all of these things right now. That's okay. The important thing is to start the conversation.

## Before Your Visit

You can prepare for your visit by writing down some of your current health issues and your questions about future health care and end-of-life care. Remember, the goal is simply to start the conversation. You do not have to make specific decisions about your medical care until you feel ready.

**How would you describe your current health? What illnesses or conditions do you have right now?**

**What concerns or questions do you have about your future health or health care?**

## What concerns or questions do you have about end-of-life care?

Select the medical treatments you would like to discuss further with your health care provider.

CPR

Organ and tissue donation

Ventilator use

Brain donation

Artificial nutrition and hydration

Pacemakers and ICDs

Comfort care

Do not resuscitate orders

Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST), or other medical orders

## Other Tips Before Your Visit

- **Decide if you would like someone to join you for your visit.** You can invite your health care proxy or someone else you trust to join you. You can even ask them to take notes. Your doctor may ask you to sign a release form before sharing information about your health with someone else.
- **Call or email in advance.** Let your doctor know that you would like to discuss advance care planning during your appointment.
- **Ask for an interpreter, if needed:** If you need an interpreter, email or call your doctor in advance to let them know.
- **Bring this booklet, worksheet, and any forms you've started or completed.** This can help guide your conversation and prioritize what you most want to discuss. If you've decided on your health care proxy, bring their contact information.

## During Your Visit

**Start the conversation.** Here are some examples of ways to start the conversation during your appointment:

- “I want to talk about my goals for care and living with my serious illness.”
- “I want to have a conversation about my wishes for end-of-life care.”
- “I’ve been thinking a lot about my health. I’d like to talk more about what to expect in the years ahead and how I can prepare myself and my family for future medical decisions.”

**Talk about your current health and share what matters to you.** If you have a health condition, like diabetes or heart disease, talk with your doctor about your condition and how it might progress. If you don’t have any medical issues right now, talk with your doctor about decisions that might come up if you develop health problems that may run in your family. For example, you might ask:

**How serious is this illness or condition?**

**How might this condition worsen other conditions I have?**

**What types of treatment or changes to my daily life should I expect in the coming weeks, months, or years?**

**What can I expect from this course of treatment? What are my other choices?**

**What can I expect if I decide to do nothing?**

**Will I be able to continue to live independently?**

**What types of treatment or care would you recommend if your own family member had this condition?**

**Share what's most important to you.** You might have certain events you want to attend. Or you may have an idea of care you do or do not want based on your experiences with someone close to you. If you feel comfortable, you might choose to share what you wrote down in the **Think About What Matters Most When Making Medical Decisions** worksheet. Here are examples of things you might say:

- **Sharing what is important to you:** “What matters most to me is \_\_\_\_\_.”
- **Sharing an important event:** “My granddaughter is having her first child later this year and I’d really like to meet the baby. Can you help me understand what I might need to do to see that happen?”
- **Sharing a loved one’s experience:** “My mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer and no one understood how quickly it would progress. I want you to be open with me and let me know your best estimate for how much time I have left.”

**Make sure you have all the information you need.** It's okay to ask your doctor questions even if it feels uncomfortable. You can also ask your doctor to write down what you've discussed or even document it in your medical record and share a copy so you can think about it further or share it with your loved ones. You can tell your doctor that you'd like to think about what you've discussed and ask to set up an appointment to have another conversation in a couple of weeks.

## After Your Visit

Your wishes may change over time. Plan to talk to your doctor about your advance directive at least once each year and after major life changes such as a divorce, death, or a serious disease diagnosis. When you complete your advance directive forms, remember to give your health care provider a copy. You can bring them to the office, or you may be able to submit them via your electronic health record.