

A health care proxy is a way to make sure someone can make decisions for you when needed. The proxy is helpful when you are unable to communicate your health care wishes to your doctors. This fact sheet discusses the following:

- A health care proxy and a health care agent
- What a health care agent does
- Choosing a health care agent
- Changing your health care proxy



What Is a Health Care Proxy and What Is a Health Care Agent?

A **health care proxy** is a legal document that lets you choose an adult you trust to make medical decisions for you in case you are unable to communicate. The person you choose or 'appoint' is called a **health care agent**.

This person must agree to be your health care agent. You must appoint them by filling out a health care proxy form. If you do not, they do not have the legal right to make decisions for you. The form can be found on your state website or requested from your health care team.

Two people must watch you sign your health care proxy form and say that you signed it willingly. These people are called witnesses and must also sign and date the document. The witnesses can be family members or medical professionals, but not the health care agent.



What Does a Health Care Agent Do For Me?

Your health care agent will be able to tell doctors what medical decisions you want when you are unable due to severe injury or illness.

You can tell the person your medical wishes either in writing, by using the form provided by your state, or by telling them directly. In general, they should be able to make decisions when your health changes unexpectedly.

Your health care agent will be able to:

- Obtain your medical records and information
- Agree with treatment decisions
- Select among different treatments
- Decide whether treatment should or should not be provided, according to your wishes



How Do I Choose a Health Care Agent?

You may choose a spouse or partner, family member, close friend or a lawyer. This person must be an adult. You cannot choose your doctor or a member of the medical staff to be your health care agent.

Once you have chosen your health care agent, tell your family who you picked and why you chose them to help avoid conflict during a crisis. It is important to let your doctor and health care team know that you have signed a health care proxy and chosen a health care agent.

Your health care agent should be someone:

- You feel comfortable speaking openly and honestly with about your wishes.
- Who is comfortable taking on the role for you, able to make difficult decisions and able to stand up for your rights and wishes.
- You know will be able to carry out your wishes regardless of their own values, religious beliefs, love for you or beliefs of others around you.
- Who lives locally or can be reached easily in case of an emergency.



What If You Want To Change Your Health Care Proxy?

A health care proxy remains legal until you decide to cancel them or specify a date when the documents will no longer be legal.

Sometimes your feelings change about your health care wishes, or your relationship with your health care agent changes and you would like to choose another person. If you decide you want to change your health care agent, follow these steps:

1. Notify your health care agent, medical team and family members of this change in writing or tell them directly.
2. Tear up and throw away all copies of the prior health care proxy.
3. Write a new health care proxy with the name of the new health care agent. You will need to sign and date the new health care proxy and have two witnesses sign and date the document.

Note: If your spouse was your health care agent and you get divorced, your health care proxy is immediately canceled.

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This fact sheet is supported by the Anna Fuller Fund, Bristol Myers Squibb and a grant from Genentech.