
Healthcare decision-making – options, benefits and risks

Summary

- Talk to your medical team in depth and research your health issues to make sure you fully understand your medical condition and your options.
 - You have the right to make decisions about your healthcare and to ask for a second opinion if you are not sure what decision to make (as long as it is not an emergency).
 - Your doctor can help you make an advance care directive that says what medical treatment you want, in case you are unable to make a decision in the future.
 - The cost, timing and regularity of treatment will affect your healthcare decisions, as will the potential impact on your family, friends and working life.
 - Decisions about your healthcare may be affected by your culture, religion or beliefs.
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There are many things to consider when making a decision that relates to your ongoing health or medical treatment. The cost, timing and regularity of medical treatment will affect your decisions, as will the potential impact on your family, friends and working life.

Getting involved in your healthcare can help you understand your health condition and medical treatment options so you can make healthcare decisions that are best for you. This may include researching your medical condition and treatment options, talking with your medical team and planning for the future.

Finding the right health information

Information about medical conditions and treatments is more available than ever before, thanks largely to health websites on the internet. But despite this easy access to health information, it is hard to know what is relevant and appropriate for you. Everyone is different and only health professionals can provide the right health information that relates to your individual medical condition.

Ask a doctor or healthcare professional about the different medical treatment options and ask them to explain to you the benefits of the treatment, along with the potential health risks.

Healthcare decisions and personal values

Your healthcare decisions may be influenced by your lifestyle, culture, religion or personal ethics. For example, you have the right to refuse medical treatment if it goes against your religious beliefs. It is important to discuss these considerations with your doctor, so they can be taken into account when planning your healthcare.

Making a healthcare decision

It is up to you how you decide to work through the decision-making process. However, there are many useful health resources available through healthcare providers and online health websites that can help guide you through the process if you feel that you need assistance.

One popular decision-making tool is the Ottawa Decision Support Framework, which was developed to help people weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different possible healthcare scenarios. It suggests a series of questions to help you come to a decision that you are more likely to be comfortable with and be able to live with in the long term.

The types of questions you are likely to encounter when making a decision include:

- What is the decision you need to make?
 - Why do you need to make the decision?
 - Do you have enough support and advice from others to make a choice?
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When considering the timing of any medical treatment, you may want to ask:

- When do you need to make the decision?
- Are there time-specific treatments involved?
- How long will it take to recover?

Weighing your options may include:

- What are the options?
- Are you leaning towards one option over another?
- What are the benefits (positives) of each option?
- What are the risks (negatives) of each option?
- How much do the benefits and risks matter to you?

Shared decision making

You have a right to make your own decisions about your healthcare, guided by the advice of health professionals. This guidance means making sure you fully understand your medical treatment options so you can weigh up options along with the benefits and risks before making a decision. This is called shared decision making. It ensures that you and your doctor are making treatment and healthcare decisions together.

This process empowers you to make decisions that are right for you. Talk to your doctor or healthcare professional about the most appropriate shared decision-making tools for you.

Shared decision making is not always the best approach. If you cannot communicate for some reason or you are faced with a life-threatening emergency, it is important to let experienced healthcare professionals make the decisions.

Making an advance care plan

Advance care planning can help the people close to you and those caring for you know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want if, for some reason, you are unable to participate in the discussions. Having the conversation and writing down your wishes for future care will help the person you choose as your medical treatment decision maker to feel more comfortable about the decisions they make on your behalf.

There is more information on recording wishes for future care and related matters in the section on [advance care plans](#).

Making healthcare decisions for someone else

If you are appointed to make medical treatment decisions for someone else, an advance care directive created by the person you are caring for can give guidance on how to make a decision on their behalf. If one is not available, any decision you make for another should be one the person would make for themselves. As far as possible, make a decision about what they would want based on previous conversations you have shared. This is why it is important to discuss a person's medical wishes with them, so you can understand their views.

Where to get help

- Your doctor(GP)

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