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.

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?

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)

**Send us your feedback**

- Rate this website
- Your comments
- Questions
- Your details

1/4 How would you rate this website?

- Excellent
- Good
- Average
- Fair
- Poor

Next Submit Now Cancel

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
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- Your details

Please note that we cannot answer personal medical queries.

If you are looking for health or medical advice we recommend that you:

- talk to your doctor or pharmacist
- dial triple zero (000) in an emergency
- ring NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24.

2/4 Your Comments

Tell us who you are:  
Select option  

Enter your comments below (optional)  

Next Submit Now Cancel

Send us your feedback

- Rate this website
- Your comments
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3/4 Questions

What are you here to do? Looking for information on  

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
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Thank you. Your feedback has been successfully sent.

More information

Browse planning and coordinating healthcare topics

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Health system explained
- Prepare and research
- Making decisions on treatment and care
- Maintaining and tracking health and care
- Taking charge of rights and responsibilities
- Paying for healthcare
- Communicating about health
- Home and community support and equipment

Health system explained

- Healthcare system in Victoria
  The Victorian healthcare system comprises a wide range of health professionals working alongside one another to provide medical and health services...
- Immunisations - vaccinations in Victoria, Australia (video)
  Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved...
- Patient-centred care explained
  Patient-centred care, also known as ‘person-centred care’, is about treating the person receiving the care in the way they want to be treated...
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
  The Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) helps cover the cost of a wide range of prescription medicines, making them more affordable...
- Primary healthcare explained
  Primary healthcare is the first contact a person has with the health care system when they have a health problem. This is usually your general practitioner (GP) or pharmacist...
- Who’s who in your healthcare team
  Your healthcare team may include a doctor, dentist, pharmacist, medical specialists, allied health professionals and complementary medicine practitioners...
- Working with your healthcare team
  If you see a number of healthcare professionals, it is important to tell them about any other healthcare services you are using...
- Young people and health services
  There are many subsidised and free medical, dental, mental, community health services available to support young people in Victoria...

betterhealth.vic.gov.au
Prepare and research

- **3 steps to better health (video)**

  Ways to improve your understanding of your health...

- **Finding reliable health information**

  Trusted health information can be found through your local doctor or pharmacy and other reliable health providers...

- **General practitioner (GP) services**

  A general practitioner (GP) is a doctor who is also qualified in general medical practice. GPs are often the first point of contact for someone, of any age, who feels sick or has a health concern...

- **Healthcare decision-making – options, benefits and risks**

  Ask a doctor and research health information when making a health decision. This will include the cost, timing and regularity of medical treatment...

- **Health information and health products online**

  Don't use online health information to self-diagnose - always see your doctor or healthcare professional...

- **Medical tourism and insurance**

  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it’s a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Medicines information leaflets for consumers**

  A Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflet gives you accurate information about the safety of your medication and how best to take it...

**Making decisions on treatment and care**

- **Advance care plans**

  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want...

- **After-hours healthcare options**

  For unexpected after-hours medical issues, there are telephone helplines, pharmacies, after-hours medical clinics or doctors who can visit you at home...

- **Making healthcare decisions for someone else**

  Family members may be involved in making healthcare decisions for you if you are unable to make decisions and it is not a medical emergency...

- **Medical tourism and insurance**

  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it’s a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Second opinions**

  You have the right to ask a doctor for a second opinion if you are unsure about your doctor's suggested medical treatment or a diagnosis...

- **Types of doctors and health professionals**

  Doctors and other health professionals all have a different role to play in your healthcare...

**Maintaining and tracking health and care**

- **Immunisations - vaccinations in Victoria, Australia (video)**

  Vaccinations are encouraged for all individuals living in the state of Victoria, Australia. The immunisation program in Victoria may be different than other countries, and individuals who have moved...

- **Making plans and decisions for the end of your life**

  Planning and making decisions about the end of your life can be a positive experience. It is a good opportunity to reflect on the things that are important to you, and to make arrangements that suit...

- **Managing long-term illness and chronic conditions**

  Chronic condition management includes positive lifestyle factors like a healthy diet, regular exercise, good sleep and social support...

- **Managing your health**

  You can manage your health by learning about healthy living, taking steps to prevent disease and having regular health checks with your doctor...

- **Regular health checks**
Regular health checks can help you identify any early signs of health issues.

- **Safe medication use**
  
  Find out how to use medication properly, so you can avoid problems such as unwanted effects and other adverse reactions.

**Taking charge of rights and responsibilities**

- **Advance care plans**
  
  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want.

- **Complaints about health services**
  
  The Health Complaints Commissioner can accept complaints about anyone who claims to provide a health service.

- **Confidentiality and privacy in healthcare**
  
  There are laws that set out how healthcare professionals can collect and store your health information and when they are allowed to share it.

**Paying for healthcare**

- **Medical tourism and insurance**
  
  People may choose to travel overseas to seek medical or surgical treatment that is unavailable in their home country. This is called medical tourism, and it’s a booming industry worldwide. People...

- **Paying for healthcare**
  
  Ask your doctor and healthcare providers what you will be charged for each new service, what is covered by Medicare and what is included in your healthcare plan.

- **Understanding health insurance**
  
  There are many health insurance providers on the market that offer a wide variety of healthcare plans.

- **Understanding Medicare**
  
  Medicare is Australia’s national public health insurance, providing free or subsidised healthcare to all Australians and most permanent residents.

**Communicating about health**

- **3 steps to better health (video)**
  
  Ways to improve your understanding of your health.

- **Advance care plans**
  
  Advance care plans can help the people close to you and those caring for you to know what is important to you about the level of healthcare and quality of life you would want.

- **Preparing for a health or medical appointment**
  
  Get the most out of your consultation by preparing for your health or medical appointment.

- **Second opinions**
  
  You have the right to ask a doctor for a second opinion if you are unsure about your doctor's suggested medical treatment or a diagnosis.

- **Talking with your doctor about sensitive issues**
  
  Building a strong, trusting relationship with your doctor can make it easier to talk with them about sensitive issues.

- **Translating and Interpreting Service**
  
  The Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) is an Australian Government interpreting service for people who do not speak English and for organisations that need to speak with their non...

- **Working with your healthcare team**
  
  If you see a number of healthcare professionals, it is important to tell them about any other healthcare services you are using.

**Home and community support and equipment**

- **Aids and equipment at home**
  
  Disability aids and equipment such as wheelchairs, walking frames and braces can help people with disabilities and the elderly gain more independence.
• Children and health services
  There is a range of subsidised and free health services, including services for mental health and dental health, available for children in Victoria...

• Healthcare and support at home
  Home care services are available for people recovering from illness or surgery, frail older people, the elderly and people with disabilities...

• Healthcare and support in the community
  There is a range of community health services and supports available for people with disabilities and the elderly still living independently at home...

• Support groups
  Support groups offer valuable advice and support and give you the chance to share information with others in a similar situation to you...

Related Information

• Finding reliable health information
  Trusted health information can be found through your local doctor or pharmacy and other reliable health providers...

• Medical treatment decision makers
  You can appoint someone to be your medical power of attorney, also known as ‘enduring power of attorney (medical treatment)’, to make medical decisions on your behalf when, in certain circumstances...

• Working with your healthcare team
  If you see a number of healthcare professionals, it is important to tell them about any other healthcare services you are using...

• When a caring role changes
  There will be times during your care role when you will need to adjust your role as the circumstances of both you and the person you care for change...

• Managing treatments and medications
  Once you have contacted disability support through the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), you will need to think about how you are going to manage your treatment and...

Home

Related information on other websites

• Decision aid
• Intro to shared decision making
• Person-centred care

Content Partner

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Find a doctor

Need to find a doctor in your local area. Take a look at the general practitioners entry in our health service profiles.

**General practitioner (GP) services**

Help to decide

Sometimes we need a bit of extra help to decide on which healthcare choice is best for us.

Try these decision aids:

- **Do I need a regular GP?**
- **Should I get a second opinion?**
- **Do I need support communicating with a doctor?**

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**Service Search**

Find services near you

Service: [Select a service]

Location:

Type a minimum of three characters then press UP or DOWN on the keyboard to navigate the autocompleted search results

- [Use my location]
- [Find a service]

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Find a doctor

Need to find a doctor in your local area? Take a look at the general practitioners entry in the health services directory.

Find a doctor

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Healthcare decision-making – options, benefits and risks

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