



# How to Be a **Health Care Agent**



Atrium Health

## What it means to be a health care agent

- You are named on a person's Health Care Power of Attorney form to make healthcare decisions for that person when they cannot speak for themselves.
- Being an agent is not about what you want.  
It is about what the person you are speaking for would want.
- It is best to talk about the person's wishes before a medical crisis.
- You may need to make decisions about:
  - Medical tests
  - Surgery
  - Medicines
  - Starting or stopping treatments (*if that is what the person wants*)
  - Releasing medical records (*giving permission to share the person's medical records with someone*)
  - Changing doctors or care locations

---

## Take these steps to prepare yourself

- Review the person's advance directive with them and keep a copy. An advance directive (Health Care Power of Attorney and/or Living Will) is a written statement of a person's wishes about their medical treatment.
- Be sure the person has shared their wishes and plans with all loved ones.  
Ask them to tell their loved ones to support you when you have to make decisions.
- Make sure you understand the person's values and goals for treatment.

## When the time comes to make decisions

- Introduce yourself to health care staff and tell them you are the health care agent
- Give the person's advance directives to the medical team
- Be informed about the patient's condition
- Speak up and share the person's wishes
- Go to the healthcare team if you have questions

**Remember, you will be making the best choices you can based on the information you have. Some decisions will come easily. Others may require more reflection.**

---

To help with these discussions, ask the person this question:  
“Are there situations where you would want a natural death rather than continuing medical treatments?”

Here are some reasons some people might feel this way:

- Not recognizing loved ones
- Severe confusion that doesn't go away
- No control over your bodily functions
- Severe pain
- Not knowing who or where you are

If you were not expected to recover from these situations, would you want to continue all medical treatments? Or would you want to stop medical treatments? Knowing the answer can help prepare you to make decisions as a health care agent.

---

### See These Additional Resources:

- How to Choose a Health Care Proxy and How to Be a Health Care Proxy – [www.theconversationproject.org](http://www.theconversationproject.org)
- Making Medical Decisions for Someone Else: A How-to Guide – <https://bit.ly/2KJMKx3>



Atrium Health complies with applicable federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability or source of payment. Atrium Health does not exclude people or treat them differently because of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability or source of payment.

ATENCIÓN: si habla español, tiene a su disposición servicios gratuitos de asistencia lingüística. Llame al 1- 800-821-1535.

CHÚ Ý: Nếu bạn nói Tiếng Việt, có các dịch vụ hỗ trợ ngôn ngữ miễn phí dành cho bạn. Gọi số 1- 800-821-1535.