

Making an Informed Decision about Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Making Health Care Decisions

Although some discussions and decisions about your health care may be difficult, it is always best to be prepared. When it is time to make important decisions, we'll openly share information to help you make informed decisions.

One of the plans of treatment is related to Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation or CPR. CPR is not appropriate for everyone because it will not benefit people who have advanced illness or who are at the natural end of their lives. Based on each patient's medical condition, it is a physician's role to determine whether or not CPR will be of benefit.

You have the right to know about what is involved in any treatment. If you don't want a certain treatment and choose to allow natural death, your health care team will offer alternatives to keep you comfortable. You will always be offered medical care. You have the right to change your mind about treatments at any time.

How can I be sure my wishes will be followed?

Your health care provider will record your wishes in your health record and special forms will be completed. You will receive a copy of the forms. It is a good idea to share these with your family and/or your Substitute Decision Maker (SDM) so they know your wishes regarding CPR. Whenever you have questions about your treatment options, please speak with your doctor or nurse.

Understanding CPR

You have the right to know what is involved in CPR, the expected benefits, risks and side effects. You have the right to refuse any treatment, including CPR.

What is CPR?

When a person's heart suddenly stops beating and/or lungs stop working, CPR is the medical treatment used to restart the heart and breathing.

CPR may include:

- Pumping on the chest
- Electric shocks
- Machines that breathe for the person

- Intravenous medications.

CPR is an aggressive treatment that is not right for everyone whose heart or breathing stops.

When is CPR most effective?

CPR works best and can save lives when:

- The procedure begins right away
- Person is quite healthy
- Heart and/or lungs unexpectedly stop due to heart attack, severe allergic reaction or drowning.

What happens if the health care team doesn't know my wishes regarding CPR?

We'll discuss your wishes regarding CPR because we need to know what to do in case of an emergency. If we do not know your wishes, we must start CPR.

The Reality about CPR

Many people believe that CPR saves everyone, even those at the natural end of their lives. This is not true. On television, CPR often looks easy and successful. The benefits of CPR are almost zero if a trained person does not begin CPR immediately.¹ The reality is that serious side effects often occur and patients could end up in worse condition. Success rates are low even in hospitals where only 12 in 100 live through the procedure and go home.²

The results of CPR are never certain. Sometimes CPR does not work at all or the person may survive with brain and organ damage, broken ribs or other serious medical conditions. These guidelines are used by the health care team when discussing options with residents, families and Substitute Decision Makers. CPR is usually not an appropriate treatment for people who have advanced or long-term medical illness or are at the natural end of their life.

How can I prepare and make informed choices?

Learn More

- Discuss your health status with your doctor and/or other healthcare providers. Based on your current condition ask what your future may hold.

Make Your Wishes Known

- Talk to your family and support networks about your wishes, values and goals.
- Decide who you want to make health care decisions for you in the event you become incapable of making your own decisions. This person is called a Substitute Decision Maker (SDM).
- Appoint your SDM by completing a Power of Attorney for Personal Care.

Develop a Plan of Treatment

- Ask your doctor to develop a plan of treatment based on your current health condition(s) that address treatments such as dialysis, feeding tube, ventilation, antibiotics and other life-prolonging interventions that might be offered as your condition changes.

Read about Advance Care Planning

The Ontario government has produced the Guide to Advance Care Planning. It provides valuable information on making choices about personal care including health care (treatment and services), living arrangements and housing, and safety. Ask your doctor for a copy or call 1-888-910-1999 to request a copy, or visit these websites:

[South West End-of-Life Care Network](#)
[A Guide to Advance Care Planning](#)

Information adapted from: Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultation Program

References:

1. Excerpts from the Fraser Health Authority, 2007
2. Predictors of survival following in-hospital CPR, Canadian Medical Association Journal, August 20, 2002, 167 (4).