

Have you completed a health care proxy?

People who plan for care at the end of life are more likely to get the medical treatment they want, and their family members experience less stress and anxiety. Preparing a health care proxy is one way to make sure your loved ones and doctors know your wishes should you become incapacitated.

With National Healthcare Decisions Day being observed on April 16, now is the perfect time to complete a health care proxy if you have yet to do so.

What is a health care proxy?

A health care proxy is a document that allows you to appoint someone to act as your health care agent for medical decisions and speak on your behalf if you are unable to do so due to illness or injury. It isn't just for older people or those facing serious illnesses and surgeries. Everyone over the age of 18 should appoint a health care agent.

You can also use your health care proxy to cite what types of treatments you would or would not want. For example, you could say, "If I am in a coma with no hope of recovery, I do not want to receive artificial nutrition provided by feeding tubes."

Choosing the right health care agent

When designating your health care agent, select someone you trust, such as a family member or close friend. Talk with them to make sure they are willing to take on this responsibility. If they agree to act as your agent, share with them your thoughts, beliefs and preferences about how you would want to be treated for the remainder of your life.

If you don't have a health care agent, family members may disagree about the types of medical care you would want and should receive. Completing a health care proxy form can prevent confusion and help your family and friends make health care decisions for you during an already stressful time.

It's easy to complete

Although a health care proxy is a legal document, you don't need to see a lawyer to complete it. Your signature on the form just needs to be witnessed by two adults other than your agent.

Once you have completed and signed your health care proxy, give a copy to your health care agent and primary care doctor. You may also want to provide a copy to close family members and even carry a copy with you. Plus, you always have the right to revoke your health care proxy and sign a new one.

Health care proxy forms are available at most doctors' offices and hospitals. You can also download one by visiting the "Frequently Used Forms" section at [independenthealth.com](https://www.independenthealth.com).