



five  
wishes

# FIVE WISHES:

## PROTECTING YOUR DIGNITY AT THE END-OF-LIFE

**dURING A MEDICAL CRISIS,** families and friends are often asked a series of painful and difficult questions: What types of medical interventions would your loved one want? What will make them most peaceful? Who do they want to be surrounded by, when and how?

Five Wishes® is an innovative document that has dramatically changed how people are tackling these important end-of-life topics, opening a dialogue among family members, friends and doctors and helping people voice their preferences and expectations. It is unique because Five Wishes looks to all of a person's needs — medical, personal, emotional, social and spiritual — and addresses them in simple, straightforward language, without clinical terms or legal jargon.

“One of the biggest misconceptions people have is that their spouses or children will know what they would want if they can't speak for themselves,” says Paul Malley, president of Aging with Dignity, a nonprofit organization that publishes Five Wishes. “Once people start having the conversation, they realize that their loved ones actually have very different expectations from what they would have anticipated. Five Wishes creates a forum to have that discussion before a crisis hits.”

Five Wishes addresses the things that can matter most at the end-of-life, such as being comfortable, staying in familiar surroundings, having loved ones nearby and receiving religious support and counsel. “That's why Five Wishes has been called the ‘living will with a heart and soul,’” explains Malley. “It provides a format for you to speak openly and honestly about all the elements of care and community that are important to you as an individual.”

Specifically, Five Wishes helps you explain to family, friends and doctors:

1. Which person you want to make health care decisions for you if you can't make them yourself.
2. The kind of medical treatment you want or don't want.
3. How comfortable you want to be.
4. How you want people to treat you.
5. What you want your loved ones to know.

Five Wishes was written with the help of the American Bar Association's Commission on the Legal Problems of the Elderly and has been deemed a valid, stand-alone living will by 42 states. It is available in 23 different languages, plus American English Braille. It's also very easy to use. All you have to do is check a box, circle a direction, or write a few sentences to communicate what you want (or don't want) at the end-of-life.

A pediatric version of Five Wishes, called “My Wishes,” has been created to guide conversations among seriously ill children, their parents and health care providers and provides space for children to convey their wishes through words or drawings.

While Five Wishes is often used with patients who are facing a terminal diagnosis, it is equally valuable for those without any current medical concerns. “Life is unpredictable and an accident or unexpected health event can happen at any time,” says Malley. “Five Wishes is about being prepared, so that no matter when these issues come up, you can take comfort in knowing that your wishes will be clearly communicated and respected, with a written record that preserves your rights and your dignity.” ❖

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# \* Five Wishes Q&A

## **Why should I fill out Five Wishes?**

Without an advance directive like Five Wishes, you may have no control over important medical care decisions that will be made if you ever get seriously ill, such as whether to give you life-support treatment or aggressively treat your pain. Completing Five Wishes is a gift to your loved ones as well, so they are not left to guess what you would have wanted.

## **What makes Five Wishes different?**

Five Wishes is the only advance directive/living will that speaks to all of a person's concerns, not just the medical and legal ones. Matters of comfort, dignity, pain management, personal and spiritual issues, family reconciliation and memorial matters are all addressed. It meets the legal requirements

and has been called the closest thing available to a national advance directive.

## **Does filling out Five Wishes guarantee that my wishes will be followed?**

Your doctor is required to follow your wishes according to the laws of your state. Discuss your wishes with your doctor after providing a copy of your Five Wishes for the medical record. It's also wise to pick a health care agent to advocate for you and your wishes.

## **Will my Five Wishes be honored wherever I go?**

When you travel, bring a copy of your Five Wishes in case you become seriously ill. Federal and most state laws are designed to honor your wishes, no matter how you express them.

# \* How to be a good health care agent

A health care agent is the person designated to make care decisions when another person is unable to communicate on their own. Aging with Dignity offers this advice to health care agents:

- » Know your loved one's wishes ahead of time. Ask detailed questions and be sure you understand what he or she would want. If you feel you cannot follow their wishes to act on their behalf, ask that someone else be chosen.
- » Tell doctors, nurses and other caregivers that you are the health care agent and how to

contact you. Give them copies of the signed Five Wishes document.

- » Ask questions of the doctors and nurses and follow up to be certain they are following your instructions. Be courteous but firm.
- » If you encounter problems, speak with a social worker, patient representative or chaplain. If a doctor doesn't want to follow your loved one's wishes, contact the ethics committee of the hospital, nursing home or hospice.



Five Wishes can be ordered online at [www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html](http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.html) or by calling 1-888-5WISHES (1-888-594-7437). To preview the full Five Wishes document, visit [www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.pdf](http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes.pdf).

## **Questions?**

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