

What You Should Know About Ventilators

What are ventilators?

Ventilators are often called “breathing machines” because they take in air for you when you are unable to breathe on your own.

When a person is started on a ventilator, a tube is inserted into their windpipe through an opening in their throat. The other end of the tube is connected to a machine that pumps air into their lungs and “breathes” for them.

What are the benefits?

Ventilators allow the body to rest while it recovers from injury or infection.

They are commonly used to breathe for patients during surgery, and for short-term treatment of illnesses such as pneumonia.

Many people are able to breathe on their own after a short period of treatment.

What are the risks?

A person on a breathing machine cannot speak or eat. The tube in their windpipe can make them anxious or make their throat sore. They may have to have their hands tied down or be given medication to prevent them from pulling it out.

Ventilators do not usually help people who are frail or have a terminal illness. A person who is very weak or very sick may never be able to breathe on their own again.

What does this mean for me?

You should know that starting on a ventilator may do more harm than good. Your family may be faced with tough

decisions regarding your care, and you may have to spend your final days in a medical facility, instead of having a peaceful, natural death at home.

Sometimes ventilators help families cope by allowing them to spend more time with their loved one, but knowing the right time to stop treatment can be very difficult for them.

Do I have a choice?

Yes. You have the right to make your own health care choices. It is up to you to decide whether or not a breathing machine is right for you.

You should think about the times you will want to use a ventilator, and the times you will not. Whatever you decide, talk first with your family and your doctor.

This information sheet was designed to give you a general description of ventilators as a treatment choice near the end of life, some pros and cons of their use, and an outline of your options for choosing whether or not you want them to be a part of your Advance Care Plan.

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What is Advance Care Planning?

Advance care planning is a thoughtful process used to plan for future healthcare choices. It involves personal reflection and discussions with loved ones and healthcare providers. Your plan should include both a Living Will and the designation of a Healthcare Surrogate who can make decisions on your behalf if you're unable to speak for yourself.

The best time to think and talk about future medical decisions is when you are *well*, rather than in a time of medical crisis.

Why should I have an Advance Care Plan?

Advances in medicine and technology have given us the ability to sustain life through artificial or mechanical interventions. In cases where patients are terminally ill with no hope of recovery, these interventions can prolong the dying process and prevent them from experiencing a peaceful, natural death.

By establishing an Advance Care Plan while you are well, you can make sure that your wishes are honored later, should you become unable to speak for yourself.

Does an Advance Care Plan encourage my death?

NO. You are not signing an agreement that says that you wish to die. You are making a choice for the future, about the kind of medical treatment you wish to receive when there is little or no hope for recovery.

Advance Care Planning Helps:

YOU make treatment decisions that can affect your life.

YOUR FAMILY have peace of mind knowing your decisions.

YOUR PHYSICIAN by providing information about the kind of care you want.

How can Project GRACE help me?

Project GRACE provides advance care planning services, free of charge, to anyone who wishes to communicate their future medical treatment decisions. The Project GRACE Advance Directive is used by many hospital systems across the country. It is acceptable to doctors and easily understood by the public. For more information, visit the Project GRACE website www.projectgrace.org or contact our office at 727-536-7364.

Project GRACE is an affiliate of the Suncoast Hospice and supported by grants, sponsorships and community donations through the Suncoast Hospice Foundation.

A gift to Project GRACE will help provide the people you care about the support and resources they need to make informed medical care decisions.

To make a donation, call 727.536.7364

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