

## Choosing a Health Care Agent: What does an Agent do?



As a competent adult, 18 years old and older, you have the right to direct your own health care decisions. However, serious accidents and illness can happen at any age, where you may not be able to make decisions about your care, even for a short while. You can choose a trusted person, called a Health Care Agent or Agent, who can step in to help you get the care you want. Your Agent is your advocate with the legal power to talk with your care providers to get you the best possible care that matches your values and choices, all through your lifetime.

<p><b>1. Who can I choose?</b></p>	<p>Your Agent can be a family member, friend, co-worker, faith or community group member — anyone you trust except a person employed in the facility where you are a patient unless related to you by blood, marriage or adoption.</p>
<p><b>2. What does my Agent do?</b></p>	<p>Your Agent is your advocate and tells your family &amp; care providers what's important to you and your instructions for care. Your Agent makes decisions based on your values, beliefs and the care you want— not what the Agent might want. You give your Agent the power to make 'any and all' decisions including life-sustaining treatments decisions or limit the Agent's powers in a Health Care Proxy.</p>
<p><b>3. When does my Agent 'step in' to make decisions? When does my Agent 'step-back'?</b></p>	<p>Your Agent can 'step in' if you have a serious illness or injury and your physician determines you are unable to make care decisions for yourself, even for a short while. If you regain your ability to make your own decisions, your Agent 'steps back' and no longer has decision-making powers. Your Agent is there for you all through your life.</p>
<p><b>4. How does my Agent make decisions for me?</b></p>	<p>Your Agent first consults with your care providers about your medical condition and the benefits and risks of possible treatment options. Your Agent then makes decisions in accordance with his/her assessment of your values, beliefs, and care choices. If your choices are unknown, your Agent makes an assessment of what is in your best interest.</p>
<p><b>5. What kinds of decisions might an Agent make?</b></p>	<p>An Agent makes decisions to help care providers match the best care to your values and choices at every phase of health. For instance, when you are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young &amp; healthy, an Agent may consider care goals that get you back to your life;</li> <li>• Managing illness, an Agent may consider 'quality of life' care goals and your priorities if your illness progresses;</li> <li>• Coping with serious illness &amp; end of life care, an Agent may consider your care goals and tradeoffs you are willing to make, and your life-sustaining treatments choices.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Do I have to appoint an Agent?</b></p>	<p>Massachusetts law says every competent adult has the right to appoint an Agent and Alternate Agent in a Health Care Proxy in order to give a trusted person(s) the legal power to make decisions for you. A spouse or family member <u>does not</u> automatically have the legal authority to make decisions unless appointed in a Health Care Proxy.</p>
<p><b>7. Do I need an attorney to appoint an Agent?</b></p>	<p>You do not need an attorney to appoint an Agent in a Health Care Proxy. We offer a no cost <b>Health Care Proxy Instructions &amp; Form</b> you can do yourself.</p>
<p><b>8. What should I talk about with my Agent?</b></p>	<p>Tell your Agent what's important to you and give instructions for the kind of care you want and do not want. We offer a no cost <b>Personal Directive Instructions &amp; Form</b> to use as a guide when talking with your Agent and to write down your care choices.</p>