

AGING WITH DIGNITY

FIVE WISHES

The *Five Wishes* document helps you express how you want to be treated if you are seriously ill and unable to speak for yourself. It is unique among all other living will and health agent forms because it looks to all of a person's needs: **medical, personal, emotional and spiritual**. *Five Wishes* also encourages discussing your wishes with your family and physician.

Five Wishes lets your family and doctors know:

1. Which person you want to make health care decisions for you when you can't make them.
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 is changing the way America talks about and plans for care at the end of life. Nearly **SIX MILLION COPIES** of the document are circulating throughout the nation. In addition, more than **10,000 ORGANIZATIONS** are distributing this revolutionary document, including churches, synagogues, hospices, hospitals, doctor and law offices, and social service agencies. Many [employers are providing *Five Wishes*](#) to their employees, to help them plan for themselves and have those delicate discussions with their aging parents.

The document speaks to people in their own language, not in "doctor speak" or "lawyer talk." It can be used in the living room instead of the emergency room. And it helps families talk with their physician about a subject that before was too hard to face.

There are a few [states](#) in which *Five Wishes* does not yet meet the legal requirements. These states either require a specific state form or that the person completing an advance directive be read a mandatory notice or "warning." Residents of these states can still use *Five Wishes* to put their wishes in writing and communicate their wishes with their family and physician. Most health care professionals understand they have a duty to listen to the wishes of their patients no matter how they are expressed.

Five Wishes was introduced and originally distributed with support from a generous grant

by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the nation's largest philanthropy devoted exclusively to health and health care.

<http://www.agingwithdignity.org/5wishes>

Living wills, which vary from state to state, can be obtained online:

1. www.uslivingwillregistry.com The U.S. Living Will Registry offers directive services for member hospitals.
 2. www.agingwithdignity.org Aging with Dignity gives details about obtaining its Five Wishes document.
 3. www.healthdirectives.org For \$18 a year, Health Directives scans directive documents and makes wallet size cards outlining how medical providers can retrieve the documents from their website.
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1. www.caringinfo.org The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization has state specific forms available. Hotline-800-658-8898.
 2. www.midbio.org Center for Practical Bioethics offers detailed tools to help with the decision making.
 3. www.nrlc.org The National Right to Life Committee provides a "Will to Live" document directing doctors to give water, food, and life saving treatment, except in specified circumstances.

The vehicle you chose to communicate your wishes only helps if you give that document to your doctors and your family.

In addition to the documents, you must have the gut-wrenching conversations with your relatives. It is amazing what you learn from those conversations.

While we had always known that my mother wished to be cremated, some unknown beliefs were exposed when discussing organ donation as part of the checklist we used. To my surprise, my mother was opposed to organ donation and, even more startling, her reason. She did not want anyone to touch her body for at least 24 hours – to allow the spirit adequate time to fully depart. With that knowledge, her wishes were honored when she died.