

LIFE-SUPPORT

WHAT IS LIFE-SUPPORT?

Life-support is used when a patient's body is unable to do parts of its job to keep the body alive. It is usually used for a short time to help the body get better and take care of itself. It is used for advanced illness, during and after surgery, if major organs fail to work on their own, during some complex treatments when the patient is sedated and other special issues. The health care team will talk about the use of life-support.

SOME LIFE-SUPPORT MEASURES INCLUDE:

- Alternative (or artificial) nutrition and hydration
- Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR)
- Dialysis (machine to clean the blood)
- Mechanical ventilator (breathing machine)
- Vasopressors (strong medicines that support blood pressure)
- Pacemaker (machine placed in heart by surgery)

WHY WOULD I NEED LIFE-SUPPORT?

Patients' organs are affected when they have cancer, surgery or other serious illnesses. Sometimes, these organs can no longer function and life-support is needed to keep the patient alive. For some patients, the organs can heal and begin to work without life-support. For others, the organs will not heal and the patient must be on life-support machines to survive.

WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?

All life-support measures are your choice. There are benefits and risks for each type of life-support.

For some patients, life-support is a short-term treatment to help the major organs heal until they can work on their own. Life-support machines give the patient what is needed to get well.

For other patients, especially those near end of life, life-support can bring mental and physical pain to their daily living. It could cause more discomfort without helping the organs heal. In a case like this, it may be more harmful to the patient. *If a patient refuses life-support, it does not mean that they don't receive other medical care. They will still receive pain treatment and other comfort measures, but are choosing to allow a natural death.*

YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM CAN HELP

Partner with your health care team to understand what life-support means for your body, condition and quality of life. Your health care team can share the benefits and risks of each option with you. Ask questions and use the information to make the decision that is best for you.