

Choosing Wisely®

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Palliative care

Support at any time during a serious illness

Palliative care is a relatively new idea in healthcare. When you get palliative care, a trained team helps you and those you care for live with a serious illness.

With palliative care, you can get physical, emotional, and spiritual support. You can get help to relieve pain and symptoms—such as fatigue, anxiety, shortness of breath, nausea, and depression. And you can get help in making a treatment plan.

Palliative care can help you at any stage of a serious illness, including congestive heart failure, kidney disease, multiple sclerosis, or cancer. But far too many patients who are seriously ill miss the benefits of palliative care. Their doctors often wait too long to order it. Or they simply don't refer patients for palliative care. Palliative care is a big help when you are seriously ill. Here's why:



Palliative care improves your quality of life and may help you live longer.

In studies of people with advanced cancer, those who got palliative care early reported better control of pain and other symptoms, compared with people who didn't get palliative care.

People who got palliative care also had a better quality of life and less depression. And they spent less time in the hospital.

These same patients who received early palliative care, along with standard cancer treatments, also lived longer than those receiving only standard treatments.

Studies suggest that there are similar benefits for people with other serious illnesses, such as congestive heart failure and multiple sclerosis.

You can get help with difficult decisions.

Your palliative care team can work with you and your family to:

- Think about the pros and cons of various treatments.
- Talk to your doctor about invasive life-support treatments, such as breathing machines or feeding tubes.
- Make your wishes clear to your family or other caregivers.

Start palliative care early for best results.

Don't wait for your doctor to talk about palliative care. You or your family can request it. Palliative care is most helpful if you start it early during a serious illness. It will have more effect on your quality of care and match your treatments to what matters most to you.

Palliative care is not “end-of-life” care or hospice.

If you are getting palliative care, you don't have to give up any other treatments for your illness—such as medicines and surgery. Palliative care can be useful, no matter how long you are expected to live.

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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