

## What If I Change My Mind?

If you later change your mind about the person you have chosen to be your proxy, or want to modify your living will, you need only fill out a new form and have it signed and dated by two witnesses. The most recent version of your health care proxy form and living will cancels all previous versions.

## What If I Have No Proxy Or Living Will?

Under New York State law, family members do not automatically have the right to make health care decisions for you. Unless you have made your wishes clear in a living will or through an appointed health care proxy, there is no guarantee that your wishes will be followed.

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## Where Can I Get More Information?

More information on living wills and health care proxies is available from the Westchester County Department of Health website at the address below:

<http://www.westchestergov.com/health>

Other valuable sources of information are:

The New York State Department of Health:  
<http://www.health.state.ny.us/>

The New York State Bar Association:  
<http://www.nysba.org/>

### Westchester County Department of Health

145 Huguenot Street  
New Rochelle, NY 10801  
(914) 813-5000

[www.westchestergov.com/health](http://www.westchestergov.com/health)



What to do when the  
**UNTHINKABLE**  
happens -

What you need to know  
about living wills and  
health care proxies

# When The **UNTHINKABLE** Happens

It can happen at any age. Accident or disease can leave you permanently unconscious or terminally ill. In a situation like that, what would you like to be done?

Some people would want to be kept alive no matter what it takes. Others would prefer not to be kept on life-support if there is no hope of recovery. There is no right or wrong choice. The only question is whether you will decide now or let others decide for you later.

To make sure your wishes are followed in a situation like this, you need to make those wishes clear before it happens. There are two ways to do that. You can write a living will and you can choose someone to be your health care proxy (representative.)

## Living Will

A living will is a written statement that you make describing what health care you would like to receive, or not receive, if you become unable to communicate your wishes.

For example, you may state in a living will that you do not want to be resuscitated if your heart stops beating. Or you may say that you want to be kept alive by any means available no matter how long you are in a coma.

You have the right to make your own health care decisions and anything you state in a living will carries the same authority as your spoken words.



*A living will is a written statement of what health care decisions you want made if you can't communicate.*

## Health Care Proxy

A health care proxy is a person you choose to make decisions about your health care if you lose the ability to make those decisions yourself. Even if you made your wishes known in a living will, it is a good idea to choose a health care proxy, also. Circumstances can change and your living will may not cover all situations. Your proxy is someone you trust to know and follow your wishes in any circumstance.

*A health proxy is a person you designate to make health decisions if you are unable to do so.*

You can give your proxy the authority to make all health care decisions for you or you can limit the kinds of decisions they can make. It is up to you. In any case, proxy decisions must be consistent with any wishes you expressed verbally or in writing

## How Do I Appoint A Health Care Proxy?

You can choose almost anyone 18 years of age and over to be your proxy. A relative or a close friend might be best but it can be anyone you trust to understand and follow your wishes. Your own doctor cannot serve as your health care proxy.

## What Paperwork Is Necessary?

A simple form is available from the Westchester County Department of Health that you can use to appoint a health care proxy and make a living will. Full instructions are included with the form.

Simply fill in the form and have it signed and dated by two witnesses. You should then give copies of the document to family members or friends and to your doctor.