

# Choosing Wisely<sup>®</sup>

*An initiative of the ABIM Foundation*

ConsumerReportsHealth



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE MEDICINE



## Palliative Care

Support at any time during a serious illness

**P**alliative care is a new idea in health care. When you get palliative care, a trained team helps you and your loved ones 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 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 a study of people with advanced cancer, those who got palliative care early reported better control of pain and other symptoms, compared to



people who didn't get palliative care. People who got palliative care 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 treatment decisions.

### **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 health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

© 2014 Consumer Reports. Developed in cooperation with the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. To learn more about the sources used in this report and terms and conditions of use, visit [ConsumerHealthChoices.org/about-us/](http://ConsumerHealthChoices.org/about-us/).

## **Advice from Consumer Reports**

# **Tips to help you get the best medical care during a serious illness**

### **Choose a coordinating doctor.**

This may be your primary care doctor or a specialist who oversees your treatment and works with your palliative care team and other specialists.



### **Ask your doctor and team about potential tests and treatments:**

- Will the test change my treatment? If not, why have the test?
- Is a treatment likely to help me live longer? If so, how much longer?
- What are the side effects of treatment, compared to the effects of my illness?
- What happens if I don't get treated?

### **Keep copies of your medical records.**

Make sure your coordinating doctor also gets your records. Keep a list of your prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines.

### **Prepare for transitions.**

Problems often happen when patients move between hospital, home, a rehab center, or a nursing home.

- Fill out forms to make sure your doctor gets records of your stay.
- Ask for “medication reconciliation” when you transfer.
- Make sure you have a follow-up care plan when you leave the hospital.

### **Prepare an “advance directive.”**

This form lets you say what care you want if you can't speak for yourself. You can download forms at [www.caringinfo.org](http://www.caringinfo.org).