

What happens if my heart stops?

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please speak to your doctor or nurse.

Why do people die?

Everybody dies. Death might be due to a sudden severe illness or injury; however, most people die from serious illnesses which they have had for a much longer time.

It may be something you do not want to think about. Often though, talking with your family or with your doctor or nurse, and making plans for that time, can make things as easy as possible for you and for those close to you.

What happens when my heart stops beating?

When you die your heart stops beating. No blood gets pumped round your body, so very quickly all parts of your body, including heart, lungs and brain, stop working.

What is Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)?

If your heart stops beating it may sometimes be possible to start it beating again.

Attempts to restart your heart will include pressing down firmly on your chest again and again and breathing for you.

In some circumstances healthcare staff might use a machine to give your heart an electric shock to try to get it to start working again. They may put a tube down your windpipe to help you breathe. They may also give you drugs to help your heart start.

This is called cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Do people fully recover after CPR?

Each person has a different chance of CPR working. The likelihood of successful CPR is generally determined by the reason your heart stopped in the first place. Overall CPR is not a very successful treatment and only about two out of ten people who have CPR survive and go home from hospital. Survival is less likely in people with lots of health problems, or those who are not close to healthcare professionals at the time their heart stops.

Even if CPR does start the heart again, people usually need more treatment afterwards, often in an intensive care unit. Some never get fully better and suffer from severe mental or physical disabilities.

The medical decision to attempt CPR or not is determined by whether the treatment is likely to be of benefit to you in terms of overall likelihood of recovery.

Will someone discuss CPR with me?

You might want to talk about what happens when you die, or you might have questions about CPR. You can always talk with your doctor or nurse about this.

Your doctor is the best person to decide if CPR is likely to help. CPR will not be attempted if it will re-start your heart and breathing for only a short time, or if it will prolong your suffering with no realistic chance of recovery.

Your health problems might mean that CPR cannot help, and your health care team will decide not to attempt it when your heart stops.

You have a right to be told that this decision has been made, unless telling you would be harmful to you. CPR decisions should also be discussed with those close to you unless you do not want them to be informed.

You can appoint someone to have power of attorney for your health. This person is then allowed to speak on your behalf when you can't do this yourself.

What if I do, or do not, want CPR to be attempted?

If it will be of benefit to you, health care professionals will not refuse your wish for CPR. However, you cannot insist on having a treatment that will not work. Doctors and nurses are not able to offer treatment that will be degrading or cause harm. If there is disagreement between you and your medical team, you are entitled to a second opinion from another healthcare professional regarding CPR.

As with any medical treatment, if you do not want CPR, you can refuse it and your health care team must respect your wishes. You can talk to your doctor or nurse about this.

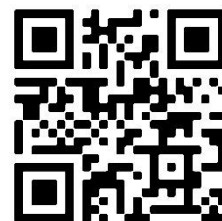
What is a ReSPECT form?

ReSPECT stands for Recommended Summary Plan for Emergency Care and Treatment. The ReSPECT form provides a way of recording a decision made in advance of a deteriorating health crisis about the types of treatment that may or may not be appropriate to offer in that situation, including CPR. Completion of a ReSPECT form about you by one of the doctors or nurses caring for you can be helpful in ensuring that your wishes regarding treatments are known about in advance. “DNACPR” forms are currently being replaced by ReSPECT forms to provide greater detail for patients and doctors about future healthcare plans and preferences. The ReSPECT form can be updated/altered if your medical condition changes.

What is the benefit of a ReSPECT form?

Your ReSPECT form will state what treatments may or may not be appropriate including CPR, rather than simply focussing on what happens if your heart stops. If your health condition changes, the decision can be reviewed. A completed ReSPECT form should be kept safe at home and travel with you to the hospital if you needed to be seen or admitted there.

For an e-copy of this leaflet, please scan the QR code



Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact Debbie Bayes, Lead Nurse for End of Life Care, Scarborough Hospital, Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL or telephone 01723 236254.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website: www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

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