

# THE TRUTH ABOUT LIFE-SUSTAINING TREATMENT

Life-sustaining medical treatments can support the body's organs when they are unable to function on their own (breathe, circulate oxygen or remove waste). These treatments are temporary and are only meant to sustain life for a short time while the healthcare team treats the cause of organ failure.

## What is organ failure?

Organ failure happens when an organ or organs are not working well enough to keep the body alive. This can happen following a severe injury, or the organs may be damaged over time due to long-term chronic health conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or respiratory diseases. When organs fail to work properly, patients experience symptoms such as shortness of breath, decreased energy, swelling in the legs and confusion.

These symptoms can be treated with medications. But depending on the degree of organ failure, the symptoms may continue to get worse over time, and can eventually lead to death.

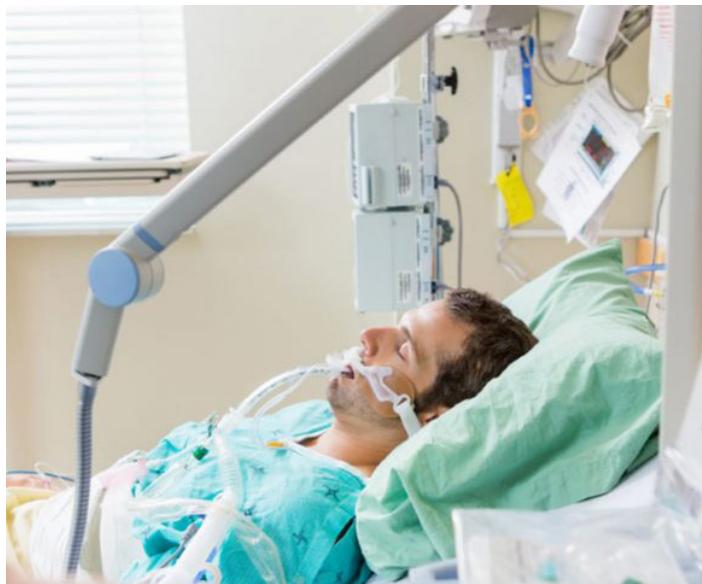
## When should I use life-sustaining medical treatments?

This is a very personal decision. It depends both on your quality of life, and the ability of your body to recover. If you have a good quality of life, then you probably would want to try life-sustaining treatments. If your life is poor and you struggle to breathe, eat and/or walk, you may want to limit or refuse treatments.

It is important to remember that life-sustaining medical treatments do not always work, and both you and your family should be prepared for this outcome.

## How long should I try?

It depends on the situation. Often, a trial period of a few days on life support will allow the healthcare team to evaluate if the situation is getting better. Some patients have conditions that would require them to be on life-sustaining treatments for an extended period.



There are only a few situations when people may want long-term life support. Most people are not comfortable with the idea of “living on machines.” Whatever your preference, talk with your family about how long you want to prolong your life with the use of machines and medical treatment.

## What is Comfort Care?

If life-sustaining treatment is not an option, or if it is not working, the healthcare team will keep you comfortable. The focus is on treating or preventing any uncomfortable symptoms that may occur. If your body is no longer capable of supporting life, you will be allowed to die naturally with dignity and respect.

