

What is CPR?

Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) is an emergency procedure done on someone whose heart or breathing has stopped. It may include:

- Chest compressions to keep blood circulating
- Rescue breathing to get oxygen to the lungs
- Electrical shock to the chest
- A tube inserted into the windpipe to get air into the lungs
- Medications to stimulate the heart

Will it work?

Most people think of CPR as what they've seen on TV or movies. That's not very accurate.

It works best:

- On the young and healthy who do not have any serious or chronic health problems
- If started within a few minutes of cardiac arrest

It does not work well for those who:

- Are older and weak
- Have significant or chronic health problems
- Have a life-limiting illness

Statistics reported by the American Heart Association on their website document that outcomes vary greatly on the setting in which CPR was initiated. On average, in-hospital patients receiving CPR have an approximately 25% chance of survival and live to discharge. For those who are older and/or living in a nursing home, the survival rate is much lower. Of those who received out-of-hospital CPR and were then hospitalized, 12% survived to discharge. Additionally, survival rate decreases with age: 8% for those 65-79 years old, 4% for those in their 80's, and 2% for those 90 years and older.

What are the risks?

Even when CPR does restart your heart or breathing, there are usually side effects including:

- Damage to ribs and/or internal organs
- Brain damage that can affect the ability to speak, recognize loved ones, and/or provide self care
- Dependence on a breathing machine/ventilator
- Care in an intensive care unit (ICU)

Your doctor can help you understand more about your risk factors and possible side effects.

Consider these Questions

Everyone has the right to make their own health care choices and inform others of their wishes in the event they cannot speak for themselves someday. These are questions to think and talk about as you decide about CPR:

- What makes life meaningful for me?
- What results could I accept by having CPR?
- Would I want to be kept alive if I couldn't breathe without a machine, think or talk, recognize my loved ones or know who I am?

Remember to inform your doctors, family and loved ones about your wishes and decisions regarding CPR as part of your advance care planning. Doing so will make the decision-making process regarding your continued care less difficult for those acting on your behalf.