

Understanding informed consent and your rights when having a baby



Key Facts

Consent is your agreement for a healthcare professional to provide you with treatment and care, including tests, medicines, treatments, or procedures. To give informed consent, you need your healthcare professional to provide enough information about your choices so that you can make informed decisions about your health and healthcare.

Informed consent is required for all treatments or procedures unless it is an emergency.

If you are unable to consent (for example, if you are unconscious), a substitute decision-maker can consent on your behalf.

If you are not satisfied with your healthcare, you can speak to your doctor or healthcare provider or make a formal complaint.

What Is Informed Consent?

Consent is your agreement for a healthcare professional to provide treatment and care, including tests, medicines, treatments, or procedures.

To provide informed consent, you must:

Have the legal capacity to consent \ (meaning you understand and can weigh your choices\)

Give your consent voluntarily \ (your decision must not be forced\)

Receive enough information about your condition and treatment options, including benefits, risks, costs, and alternatives, and have the opportunity to ask questions

What Are My Healthcare Rights?

Every individual has fundamental rights regarding their healthcare. These typically include the right to:

Access healthcare and treatment that meets your needs

Receive safe, high-quality care in a respectful environment

Be treated as an individual with dignity

Make decisions in partnership with healthcare providers

Obtain clear and complete information about your condition and treatment options

Have your privacy protected

Provide feedback or make a complaint without it affecting the care you receive

How Can I Give Informed Consent?

Informed consent can be given verbally, in writing, or through implied actions.

The type of consent required depends on the nature of the treatment or procedure. For instance, allowing a doctor to examine you implies consent for a physical check-up. However, for more complex procedures, such as surgery, written consent is typically required.

Can Others Sign a Consent Form on My Behalf?

Generally, you must give informed consent yourself. However, if you are unable to consent-due to unconsciousness or lack of legal capacity-a substitute decision-maker can consent on your behalf.

If you are under 18, a parent or legal guardian typically provides consent.

If you are an adult who anticipates situations where you may be unable to consent, you can appoint a substitute decision-maker in advance through a

medical power of attorney.

Can I Change My Mind After Signing a Consent Form?

Yes, in most cases, you can change your mind at any time, even after giving consent or signing a form. If you decide to withdraw consent, inform your healthcare provider immediately.

What If I Don't Want the Treatment Being Offered?

You have the right to refuse treatment. No one can force you to undergo a medical procedure without your informed consent or the consent of your substitute decision-maker if you cannot consent yourself.

Before making a decision, ensure you understand the potential benefits and risks of both the treatment and the choice to decline it. If you need more time or further clarification, do not hesitate to ask your doctor or healthcare provider for more information.

Are There Situations When Informed Consent Is Not Needed?

Informed consent is not required in emergencies where urgent treatment is necessary to save your life or prevent serious harm to your health.

If you have specific wishes about refusing certain treatments (such as blood transfusions), it is important to communicate them in advance to your healthcare providers.

Who Can I Speak to If I'm Not Satisfied With My Healthcare?

If you are not satisfied with your healthcare, there are several steps you can take:

Speak directly with your doctor, nurse, or healthcare provider.

Contact a local health complaints agency or healthcare regulatory body.

If your concerns involve professional misconduct or unsafe practices, you may report them to a medical licensing board or health ombudsman.

If you are unsure about something that happened to you, particularly during labor, birth, or an emergency, ask your doctor or healthcare provider for a debrief. This allows you to discuss the event and gain clarity about what occurred.

Resources and Support

If you need further information about informed consent and healthcare rights, consider consulting:

Healthcare consumer advocacy organizations
Patient rights groups
Medical ethics committees
Legal aid services specializing in healthcare rights

Understanding your rights and the concept of informed consent can help ensure you receive the best possible care while maintaining control over your healthcare decisions.