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# Patientenverfügung — Planning Ahead for Medical Emergencies

What a Patientenverfügung is, why it matters, and how to document your medical wishes in advance.

**Deutsche Begriffe:** Patientenverfügung | Vorsorgevollmacht | Betreuungsverfügung | Notfallausweis | Selbstbestimmung

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## What is a Patientenverfügung?

A **Patientenverfügung** is a document in which you specify which **medical measures** you wish to receive or refuse — in case you **can no longer decide for yourself** (e.g., in case of serious illness, accident, unconsciousness, dementia).

Since 2009, the Patientenverfügung has been **legally regulated** (§ 1827 BGB) and is **binding** for doctors and guardians.

Why is it important?

Without a Patientenverfügung, **doctors and guardians** make decisions about your treatment — and not always as you would wish. Typical conflict situations:

- **Life-sustaining measures** — ventilators, artificial nutrition
- **Resuscitation** — after cardiac arrest
- **Intensive care medicine** — in severe illness with no prospect of improvement
- **Organ transplantation** — organ donation after death

## What precautionary measures are available?

There are **three important documents** that go together:

1. Patientenverfügung

- Regulates **medical measures** (treatment wishes and refusals)
- Only applies if you **can no longer decide for yourself**
- Must be **in writing** (handwritten or printed + signature)
- **No notary required** — but medical consultation recommended

## 2. Vorsorgevollmacht

- Appoints a **trusted person** to make decisions for you when you cannot
- Covers: **health, finances, authorities, housing**
- Without a Vorsorgevollmacht, the **court appoints a guardian** — could be a stranger!
- Recommendation: **Notarial certification** (often required for real estate and bank transactions)

## 3. Betreuungsverfügung

- Specifies **whom the court** should appoint as guardian if no authorized representative exists
- You can also specify whom you **do not want** as guardian

## What should be in the Patientenverfügung?

### Medical situations

Describe **specifically** the situations for which your Patientenverfügung should apply:

- **Terminal stage of an incurable disease** (e.g., end-stage cancer)
- **Permanent loss of decision-making capacity** (e.g., advanced dementia, persistent vegetative state)
- **Acute medical emergency** (e.g., cardiac arrest, severe accident)
- **Brain damage** with permanent unconsciousness

### Treatment wishes

For each situation, specify whether you **wish or refuse** the following measures:

Measure	Example
<b>Resuscitation</b>	Chest compressions, defibrillation
<b>Artificial ventilation</b>	Ventilator in intensive care

Measure	Example
<b>Artificial nutrition</b>	Feeding tube, infusions
<b>Dialysis</b>	Artificial kidney dialysis
<b>Antibiotics</b>	For pneumonia in terminal stage
<b>Blood transfusion</b>	In case of severe blood loss
<b>Pain management</b>	Even if it could shorten life (palliative care)
<b>Organ donation</b>	After determination of brain death

## Personal values

Describe your **personal values** so doctors and guardians better understand your wishes:

- What does **quality of life** mean to you?
- When would a life no longer be **worth living** for you?
- What role do **religious or cultural beliefs** play?
- Do you have **fears** about certain measures?

## How do I create a Patientenverfügung?

### Step 1 — Get informed

- **Federal Ministry of Justice** (bmj.de) — free brochure and text templates
- **Consumer centers** — guides and forms
- **Medical consultation** — your family doctor can explain medical aspects

### Step 2 — Draft the document

- Use **text templates** (BMJ brochure) or seek advice
- Formulate **specifically** (not: "I don't want pointless treatment")
- Describe **situations** and desired/refused measures

### Step 3 — Sign

- **Date** and **signature** are required
- Notarial certification is not necessary (but possible)
- **Doctor's countersignature** recommended (confirms capacity to consent)

## Step 4 — Store and inform

- Keep **original** at home (easily accessible!)
- **Copies** to: authorized representative, family doctor, close persons
- **Information card** to carry in wallet (location of Patientenverfügung)
- **Central Advance Directive Registry** — registration with Federal Notary Chamber (zvr-online.de, fee: 13-20 €) — courts and hospitals can check there

## Step 5 — Review regularly

- Review the Patientenverfügung every **2-3 years**
- **New signature** with date — confirms you stand by your wishes
- When **life circumstances change** (e.g., serious illness, divorce), update accordingly

## Costs

Service	Cost
Creating Patientenverfügung yourself	<b>Free</b> (BMJ templates)
Medical consultation	<b>€0-50</b> (many doctors advise free of charge)
Notarial certification	<b>€60-100</b>
Registry (online)	<b>€13-20</b> (one-time)
Consumer center (consultation + form)	<b>€10-30</b>

## Validity

- **No expiration date** — the Patientenverfügung remains valid until you revoke it
- **Can be revoked anytime** — verbally or in writing, even informally
- **Minors** cannot create a valid Patientenverfügung (only from age 18)
- **Regular confirmation** (new signature + date) strengthens binding effect

## Special considerations for foreigners

Does the Patientenverfügung apply abroad?

- A German Patientenverfügung is basically valid **only in Germany**
- In **EU countries** it is often recognized, but not guaranteed
- Recommendation: Create a **bilingual version** (German + your native language)

### Religious and cultural aspects

- **Islam:** Life-sustaining measures are often favored, organ donation is controversial
- **Christianity:** Self-determination at end of treatment is accepted
- **Judaism:** Life preservation has high value
- **Buddhism/Hinduism:** Varying views on assisted dying

**Important:** The Patientenverfügung respects **your** personal decision — regardless of religious rules.

## Tips

- 1. Create it now** — don't wait for illness, an accident can happen to anyone
- 2. Don't forget Vorsorgevollmacht** — it's at least as important as the Patientenverfügung
- 3. Include your trusted person** — discuss your wishes openly
- 4. Consult your family doctor** — clarify medical terminology
- 5. Carry an information card** — in your wallet so everything can be found in an emergency

--- Status: March 2026. All information without warranty.