

# Decision Guides For End of Life Planning

## Mechanical Ventilation

### WHAT IS VENTILATION?

Mechanical Ventilation is the act of trying to help with breathing when a person has difficulty, or trying to restore breathing when breathing has stopped. This may be done by blowing air into the lungs by mouth to mouth or using air given through a mask or tube.

A ventilator (VEN-til-a-tor) is a machine that supports breathing. Ventilators:

- Get oxygen into the lungs.
- Removes carbon dioxide from the body.

Assisting breathing may be provided by giving air through a mask called positive airway pressure. It involves putting a mask over a person's nose and mouth, and air is forced into the lungs. This is called CPAP or BiPAP. The BiPAP/CPAP mask enables the individual to support his or her own respiration by providing enough pressure when the individual inhales to keep his or her airways open.

These methods of assisted breathing may not work as well if your body is shutting down from long-lasting health problems, illnesses that can no longer be treated or you can no longer tolerate a BiPAP or ventilator.

Air can also be given through a tube inserted through the nose or mouth and into the lungs and this tube is then connected to a breathing machine (ventilator) which breathes for the person. A ventilator does not treat a disease or condition. It is used only for life support.

### WHAT TO EXPECT ON A VENTILATOR?

Your loved one may feel frustrated or anxious because he or she can't talk while on the ventilator. They may have pain from air being forced into lungs or may have trouble swallowing or coughing.

Often patients on a ventilator are given medicine that puts them in a coma-like condition so that the ventilator does all the work of breathing.

Your loved one will be fed through an IV (intravenous) or feeding tube while on the ventilator. If your loved one is strong enough, he or she may sit up in a chair while on the ventilator.



**Face Mask for positive airway pressure**