

# SPEAK FOR YOURSELF

*Plan Your Care*

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**PACE of southwest Michigan**  
Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly

## Mechanical Ventilator (Breathing Machine)



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Information  
Provided by:



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Making the choice about mechanical ventilation for yourself or a loved one is not easy. This brochure provides information to help when thinking about mechanical ventilation.

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## What is Mechanical Ventilation?

Mechanical ventilation is the use of a machine to support breathing. Its purpose is to:

- assist a person having difficulty breathing, or
- try to restore breathing because a person has stopped breathing or lost the ability to breathe on his/her own.

Mechanical ventilation is done by placing a tube in the airway, through the nose or mouth and into the lungs. The tube is then connected to a machine called a ventilator, respirator, or a breathing machine. Sometimes people can use a machine that helps with breathing through a mask.

## When is Mechanical Ventilation used?

Mechanical Ventilation is used:

- when a person can no longer breathe well enough on his or her own because of a disease
- as a temporary treatment during or after surgery, or to allow the lungs to rest while an illness is being treated
- to help a person breathe when they are not able to take enough of their own breathes to meet their body's needs
- when a person can no longer breathe on his/her own for a short-term, long-term, or the rest of their lives
- during and after cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Those who survive CPR often need a ventilator for a period of time.

## What are the risks with using Mechanical Ventilation?

Some risks of using a ventilator include pneumonia, collapsed lung, and lung damage.

A ventilator can cause discomfort in the throat, fear, and sleep problems. Medicine may be needed to treat discomfort, which can cause people to be in a deep sleep for hours or days.

Persons using a ventilator are not able to talk using their voices. A conscious person may communicate by writing, hand gestures or other ways.

Activity and movement is limited with a ventilator. Persons may be able to sit up in a chair or bed.

If on a ventilator for a long period of time, nutrition will need to be provided via a tube into the stomach.

Those using a ventilator need constant medical care assistance. This care is not available in all care settings.

## Outcome-based trials of Mechanical Ventilation:

A ventilator may be used on a trial basis to see if the person can recover his/her breathing ability. If the person's condition does not improve or gets worse, a decision can be made to remove the breathing tube. This decision may be made by comparing the desired outcome for the person and the present situation. Desired outcomes can be discussed with your physician to understand what might be most helpful to you.

Making the decision to remove a ventilator can be very difficult for a person's loved ones. Have a discussion with your medical providers and loved ones about your wishes and decisions before a crisis occurs.