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What is...? series

What is quality of life?

- **Quality of life** is a descriptive term that refers to people's emotional, social and physical wellbeing, and their ability to function in the ordinary tasks of living.
- **Health-related quality of life analyses** measure the impact of treatments and disease processes on these holistic aspects of a person's life.
- Quality of life is measured using **specially designed and tested instruments**, which measure people's ability to function in the ordinary tasks of living.
- Quality of life analyses are particularly helpful for: investigating the **social, emotional and physical effects** of treatments and disease processes on people's daily lives; analysing the effects of treatment or disease **from the patient's perspective**; and determining the need for **social, emotional and physical support** during illness.
- Quality of life measures can therefore help to **decide between different treatments**, to inform patients about the **likely effects of treatments**, to monitor the **success of treatments** from the patient's perspective, and **to plan and coordinate care** packages.
- It is important not to confuse quality of life measures with utility measures, which are used to calculate quality-adjusted life-years (QALYs). Unlike utility measures, quality of life measures **attempt to evaluate directly the impact of a disease or treatment** on people's ability to function in life, not the value that they place on a particular health state.

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