

How Do I Pick A Nursing Home?

The following is a checklist to use as you search for an assisted-living residence for your loved one. It will help you to decide on the right facility. Plan to make at least one unannounced visit and take this checklist with you. After your visits, ask the administration to answer questions that can't be answered by observation. Also ask the administrator to respond to any shortcomings you have seen.

PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

1. *Location.*

- a. Is it pleasing to the resident?
- b. Convenient for the resident's doctor?
- c. Convenient for family and frequent visitors?
- d. Near a hospital?
- e. Is the neighborhood safe?
- f. If on a busy street, are there safeguards?

2. *Accident prevention.*

- a. Well-lighted inside and out?
- b. Free of hazards underfoot?
- c. Chairs sturdy and not easily tipped?
- d. Warning signs posted around freshly washed or waxed floors?
- e. No water or food spills on floors?
- f. Handrails in hallways and guard rails in bathrooms?

3. *Fire and Personal Safety.*

- a. Meets federal and state codes?
- b. Exits clearly marked and unobstructed?
- c. Written emergency evacuation plan?
- d. Frequent fire drills?
- e. Exit doors not locked on the inside?
- f. Visible and accessible fire alarms and fire extinguishers?
- g. Stairways enclosed and doors to stairways kept closed?
- h. Alarm system or some way to identify when a resident leaves the premises who is not supposed to leave?
- i. Doors locked after a reasonable hour at night?
- j. A way to identify and expel unwelcome visitors?
- k. A written and enforced policy regarding employee theft and resident abuse?
- l. Are there adequate facilities for smokers? Are they separate from non-smokers? Are they fair and reasonable for smokers? (Don't have to go outside to smoke)
- m. Are smoking rooms properly ventilated and sprinklered?

4. *Bedroom.*

- a. Opens into hall?
- b. Window(s) in room?
- c. No more than 4 beds per room?
- d. Easy access to each bed?
- e. Privacy drapery for each bed?
- f. Nurse call button by each bed?
- g. Fresh drinking water by each bed?
- h. At least one comfortable chair for each resident?
- i. Reading light?
- j. Ample light to make room safe at night?

- k. Clothes closet and drawers?
- l. Room for a wheelchair to maneuver?
- m. Care in selecting and resident preferences taken into account concerning roommates?

5. Room Cleanliness.

- a. Generally clean even though it may have a "lived-in" look?
- b. Free of unpleasant odors?
- c. No visible signs of insect infestation?
- d. Food trays promptly picked up after meals?
- e. Sanitary bathroom facilities?
- f. Soap and paper towels available?
- g. Do residents appear to be bathed regularly?
- h. Incontinent residents given prompt attention?

6. In-room Bathroom.

- a. Is there a sink?
- b. Is there soap, towels, toilet paper?
- c. Are the facilities easy for a wheelchair-bound resident to use?
- d. Are there hand grips near the toilet?
- e. Is there a nurse call button?

7. Lobby.

- a. Is the atmosphere welcoming?
- b. If also a lounge area for residents, is it being used?
- c. Furniture attractive and comfortable?
- d. Plants and flowers?
- e. Certificates and licenses on display?

8. Hallways.

- a. Large enough for 2 wheelchairs to pass with ease?
- b. Hand grip rails on sides?
- c. Carpeted or vinyl? Residents often find vinyl or hard surfaces easier to get around on but carpet is softer. Vinyl/hard surfaces are easier to keep clean and odor free but they can be dangerous when wet. There are advantages and disadvantages to both but vinyl is generally preferred.

9. Dining Room.

- a. Attractive and inviting?
- b. Comfortable and safe tables and chairs?
- c. Easy to move around and get to and from table?
- d. Tables conveniently set for those in wheelchairs?
- e. Food tasty, nourishing and appetizing?
- f. Food warm?
- g. Meals match posted menu?
- h. Those needing help to eat receiving it?
- i. Dining room not too hot or cold?
- j. Meals served promptly and on schedule?

10. Kitchen.

- a. Food preparation, garbage, and dish washing areas separated?
- b. Perishable food not left on counters?
- c. Kitchen staff observes sanitation rules and practices?
- d. Last inspection results?

- e. No unpleasant odors and visibly clean?

11. Activity Room.

- a. Is there one available?
- b. How well-equipped is it? Are there books, television(s), craft supplies, VCR(s), piano, stereo or radio?
- c. Are the residents using the room and equipment?
- d. Is it bright and inviting?

12. Special-purpose Rooms.

- a. Are there rooms set aside for physical exams or therapy?
- b. Is there a barber shop/beauty salon?
- c. Are the rooms being used for the stated purpose?

13. Isolation Facilities?

- a. At least one bed and bathroom set apart for residents with contagious diseases?
- b. Is it isolated enough from other residents?
- c. Are there posted signs and restricted access?
- d. Is there special staff assigned and is there separate clothing/equipment used or a way to change and sterilize them?

14. Communal Showers and Bathrooms.

- a. Are they close to bedrooms?
- b. Easy for a wheelchair-bound resident to use?
- c. Bathtubs and showers with non-slip surfaces, handrails and other safety equipment?
- d. Nurse call button?
- e. Clean and odor free?

15. Exterior Building and Grounds.

- a. Is there a place for residents to get fresh air that is enclosed and safe?
- b. Are there ramps for wheelchairs?
- c. Are the grounds well maintained?
- d. Is the building well maintained?
- e. Does it appear that an inappropriate amount of money (either too much or too little) is spent on "externals"?

CARE SERVICES

1. Medical.

- a. Physician available quickly in an emergency?
- b. Private physician(s) allowed?
- c. Regular medical attention assured?
- d. Thorough physical exam before or upon admission?
- e. Resident involved in developing plan for treatment?
- f. Medical records and care plan kept?
- g. Other medical services provided (dentists, optometrists, etc.)?
- h. Freedom to purchase medicines outside the facility?
- i. Do existing residents appear healthy?
- j. Resident taken seriously when complaining of illness?
- k. Prompt action given to resident's sudden illnesses, infections, etc.?
- i. Does the home provide special services such as specific diet or therapies that the resident may need?

2. Hospitalization.

- a. Arrangement with nearby hospitals for transfer if necessary?
- b. Transportation available to nearby hospital?

- c. Who determines need?

3. Nursing.

- a. R.N. responsible for nursing staff in a skilled nursing home?
- b. L.P.N. on duty day and night in a skilled nursing home?
- c. Trained nurses' aides and orderlies on duty?
- d. Caring and compassionate staff?
- e. Adequate staff at all hours and reasonable working hours?

4. Rehabilitation.

- a. Specialist in various therapies available when needed?
- b. Residents given therapy until completely rehabilitated?

5. Food.

- a. Dietician-planned menus for residents? (Both regular and special-diet residents)
- b. Variety from meal to meal?
- c. Food delivered to residents' rooms?
- d. Help with eating when needed?
- e. Snacks and food available between meals and at night?

6. Grooming.

- a. Barber/beautician available to residents (men and women) at little or no cost?
- b. Laundry services available?
- c. Shaving help for men?
- d. Toiletries (Deodorant, colognes, shampoo, shaving cream, etc.) supplied by home or resident?

SOCIAL SERVICES

1. Social Service.

- a. Social worker available to help residents and families?
- b. Grievance resolution program?

2. Activities Department.

- a. Group and individual activities available?
- b. Individual resident preferences observed?
- c. Resident encouraged but not forced to participate?
- d. Outside field trips for those who are able? (Stores, movies, restaurants, etc.)
- e. Volunteers from the community assist with resident activities?
- f. Frequency of activities?

3. Religious Services.

- a. Arrangements made for resident to worship as he/she chooses?
- b. On-site services provided?
- c. Religious observance a matter of choice?

ADMINISTRATION & POLICIES

1. Staff.

- a. Administrator and staff available to discuss problems?
- b. Residents and relatives able to discuss complaints without fear of reprisal?
- c. Administrator takes time to relate personally with residents?
- d. Administrator takes time to personally inspect premises?
- e. Staff is courteous and professional?

- f. Staff responds to call buttons quickly and courteously?
- g. No abusive or coarse language or actions?

2. Human Rights.

- a. Resident may participate in planning care and treatment?
- b. Medical records kept confidential?
- c. Can veto experimental research/treatments?
- d. Have freedom and privacy to attend to personal needs?
- e. Married couples may share room?
- f. Civil rights regulations observed?
- g. All have opportunity to socialize?
- h. May manage own finances if capable or obtain accounting help if not?
- i. May decorate own bedroom, have personal items such as furniture, electronic equipment and hobby supplies?
- j. May wear own clothing?
- k. May communicate with anyone without censorship or retribution?
- l. Resident is not transferred or discharged arbitrarily?
- m. If a smoker, may continue to smoke? (What facilities are provided)
- n. Visiting hours accommodate residents, family and visitors?

GENERAL

1. Regulatory Requirements.

- a. Does the home have a current license from the state.
- b. Does the administrator have a current license from the state?
- c. Does the state have any outstanding complaints or deficiencies credited to the home?
- d. If you need and are eligible for financial assistance, is the home certified to participate in government or other programs that provide it?

2. Do You See?

- a. Alert, clean and healthy residents unless very ill?
- b. Visitors and volunteers who are pleased with the home?
- c. A pleasant, home-like environment?
- d. Anything that disturbs you?

Finding a good nursing home is a difficult task. In addition to this checklist, we highly suggest that you take time to talk to several residents. Many homes have resident councils or other forms of resident government. Find out who are the members of the council and talk to them about their satisfaction with the facility. It's important to get many opinions because you can then determine if there are common concerns. One resident may be upset about something that isn't a real problem but if several voice the same concern it can be a red flag.

Another source of information can be the family council. Many homes have this advisory group which is made up of residents' families. Find out when they meet and discuss the facility's performance with them.

Don't forget the importance of what you see and feel about a facility. If you're not comfortable, your family member won't be either.

It's important to realize that the facility will be putting on its very best face for your guided visits. Making unscheduled, unannounced visits is critical in determining the day-to-day conditions of the home. When you choose a facility your choice doesn't have to be permanent. Think of the first few months as a trial period and not a final decision. That way neither you nor your family member will be unsettled if a change is needed.

The selection process can be difficult, confusing and frustrating. Enter into it with patience and your eyes wide open. Keep the old saying, "Caveat Emptor: Let the buyer beware," always in mind.

