

## CHOOSING AN ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY

([http://www.seniorlink.com/articles/A32\\_N7\\_ALF.html](http://www.seniorlink.com/articles/A32_N7_ALF.html))

Selecting a new home for an older person is a major decision that requires careful research. If your family needs to find an assisted living residence quickly—for example, if Mom or Dad is leaving rehab and cannot return home—then you might consider consulting a professional care manager. A care manager who is familiar with the residences in your community can shortcut the research process and help you make the right choice.

If you are conducting your own search, start with the most basic criteria: location and services. A residence located close to friends and family makes it more likely that the elder will have regular visitors. The frequent presence of loved ones can go a long way in easing the transition to a new home.

You also need to match your elder's needs to the services offered at a residence. An obvious example is dementia care. If the elder suffers from Alzheimer's disease, you will need to locate a facility with a specialized dementia care unit. But other conditions also warrant special amenities, like wheelchair accessibility or 24-hour nursing coverage. Don't forget to look ahead and imagine future needs, too. Can the facility accommodate your loved one if his or her health needs change? Some facilities—known as continuing care retirement communities—offer graduated levels of care, from independent living arrangements to skilled nursing care.

You should evaluate several facilities, at least to establish a basis for comparison. Make more than one visit to a residence, and try to do so at different times of day to observe the different patterns and staff interactions that occur. Some residences will allow or recommend that the elder make a short-term stay to try out the new arrangement. This can be a good strategy for transitioning an elder who is hesitant or

resistant to moving.

In addition to using an evaluation checklist, like the one offered by the [Assisted Living Federation of America](#), consider the following factors when screening assisted living residences.

### **Licensure**

Regulations and licensing of assisted living residences vary from state to state. In fact, different states have different definitions of assisted living. Inquire about the training of staff, especially. Does the state and/or the company dictate the staff's experience level and training requirements? For example, what are the required qualifications of the staff member tasked with dispensing medications?

### **Appropriate accommodations**

The definition of assisted living is broad. Facilities may offer various types of accommodations—such as independent apartments, individual bedrooms or suites, shared units and specialized units for dementia. An elder's level of functioning should determine the type of unit s/he occupies. Consider what will happen if the elder's health changes. Are the accommodations adaptable? If not, how and when will this be communicated to family?

### **Services and pricing**

A resident agreement or contract will define what is included in the base price. Some facilities charge a separate fee for personal care services. Others might even contract this work out to an agency. Be clear what the senior's needs are and how they will be met and paid for. For example, will the elder need help with dressing? If so, what type of dressing assistance is provided? Does the staff simply lay the clothes out or will they help the elder take clothes on and off?

Think about other services, too, like housekeeping and transportation to and from shopping and medical appointments. It is also important to ask about nursing care. For

instance, if your elder ever needs nursing care on a temporary basis, how will it be arranged? It is important to realize that if an elder needs 24-hour nursing care or supervision, a nursing home is the most appropriate choice.

### **Staff availability**

Are staff members available 24 hours/day to assist residents with activities of daily living, like bathing and toileting? Are they flexible in accommodating the elder's schedule for personal care? Some residences only employ clinical staff during the day. How does the facility handle emergencies that occur at night? Inquire about staff ratios during all shifts.

### **Socializing and meals**

Many people move to assisted living because they need more social interaction than they can get living at home. Is there a schedule of diverse activities for residents? Ideally the residence will have a staff member devoted to recreation who solicits input from residents. If you think your parent will have trouble assimilating, ask whether s/he will be encouraged to participate. Meals are a significant part of social life, so you'll also want to observe the dining areas and meal plan.

### **During the tour**

Tour a facility from the elder's perspective. Get a sense of the atmosphere, noticing the physical condition of the building and furnishings in both the units and the common areas. Also observe the interaction between staff and residents. Do they call each other by name? The presence of pets and/or plants can make a residence feel more like home. To this end, also ask to see one of the individual units in use. Some facilities encourage residents to bring their own furnishings, which can ease the transition from home and help maintain a sense of independence.

Lastly, keep in mind that a residence must be aesthetically pleasing and functional. Is it easy to find your way around the facility? If your elder uses a wheelchair or walker, consider

whether they can maneuver easily around the unit (including the bathroom) and common areas.

