

Choosing a Residential Care Setting

Choosing a residential care setting may seem like an overwhelming task, but asking the right questions and knowing what to look for in a long-term care setting can make it more manageable. Because residential care is available in a variety of settings, it's important to understand the needs of the person with dementia so you can choose the best care.

Questions to Ask

When choosing a care community, there are a number of factors to consider, including the staff, the environment, the programs and the type of treatment provided. Consider asking the following:

Family Involvement

- Are families encouraged to participate in care planning?
- How are families informed of changes in resident's condition and care needs?
- Are families encouraged to communicate with staff?



Residents

- Is personal care (e.g., bathing, grooming, toileting) done with respect and dignity?
- Is there flexibility in personal care times based on an individual's schedule?
- Are residents comfortable, relaxed and involved in activities?
- Are residents well-groomed, clean and dressed appropriately?
- What is the rate of falls?
- Are residents with psychiatric illness as their primary diagnosis on the same unit as residents with dementia?

Staffing

- Is medical care provided? How often are physicians and nurses or nurse practitioners on premises?
- Is there a registered nurse on site at all times?
- Is personal care and assistance provided?
- Is care personalized to meet specific needs, abilities and interests?
- Are staff trained in dementia care?
- How long is the training and what topics are covered?
- On average, how long have workers been on staff?
- How does staff handle challenging behaviors?
- What is the ratio of residents to staff?



Environment

- Is the facility free of unpleasant odors?
- Do indoor spaces allow freedom of movement and promote independence?
- Are indoor and outdoor areas safe and secure? Are they monitored?
- Is the facility easy to navigate?
- Is there a designated family visiting area or a private place to have visitors?
- Are resident rooms clean and spacious?
- Are residents allowed to bring familiar items (e.g., photos, bedding, a chair)?



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Meals

- Are there regular meal and snack times?
- Is food appetizing? (Ask to see the weekly menu and come for a meal.)
- Is there flexibility in meal times based on the individual's personal schedule?
- Is the dining environment pleasant and comfortable?
- Are family and friends able to join mealtime?
- Is there a plan for monitoring adequate nutrition (food and fluid)?
- Is staff able to accommodate special dietary needs (e.g., low sodium, diabetic)?
- Do staff provide appropriate assistance based on person's abilities (e.g., encouragement during meals or assisted feeding if needed)?
- Are there any environmental distractions during mealtime (e.g., noisy TV)?



Programs and Services

- Are appropriate services and programming available based on specific care needs? (e.g., small groups, quiet rooms, dementia specific)
- Do planned activities take place? (Ask to see an activity schedule; was the activity on time?)
- Are activities available on weekends or evenings?
- Are activities designed to meet specific needs, interests and abilities?
- Is transportation available for medical appointments and shopping?
- Are care planning sessions held regularly? Are times flexible/convenient?
- Which therapies (e.g., physical, occupational, speech, recreational) are offered?
- Is there a dementia-specific (special care) unit?
- Are religious services and celebrations available to residents?



Policies and Procedures

- Can family and friends participate in care?
- Do visiting hours work for your family?
- Has the discharge policy been discussed? What situations/conditions lead to a discharge (such as change in behavior or financial circumstances)?
- Is continuing care available as a resident's needs change?
- Is there an "aging in place" policy where residents remain in the community — even the same room — throughout the course of the disease?
- Does the community provide an escort to the emergency room if a visit is required?
- Does the community provide end-of-life care? Is hospice care available if needed?



For more information, visit alz.org/residentialfacilities.

Visit the Alzheimer's Association & AARP Community Resource Finder (alz.org/CRF) to access a database of dementia and aging-related resources in your area, including residential care facilities.