

Evaluating Residential Facilities

Once you have identified prospective facilities, you'll want to schedule personal visits in order to make a firsthand evaluation of their respective services, quality, environment and personnel. It's also a good idea to do some research in advance of each visit.

Your state's *Long-Term Care Ombudsman* or *Health Department* are good places to start. Either can help you obtain regulations for long-term care facilities. All licensed nursing homes are governed by these rules and they are inspected regularly to ensure compliance. The results of these inspections may be helpful in your evaluation.



Visiting the Facility

During your visit, it's important to make note of the overall atmosphere and to talk extensively with staff members. Be aware of any hesitancy to answer questions or provide information. If they are reluctant to communicate openly now, you have reason to believe this pattern may repeat itself in the future.

Here are some additional guidelines to consider:

Prepare a list of questions about the facility's philosophy of care, the longevity of their staff, their specific experience with dementia patients, and the degree to which they involve families in their residents' treatment plans.

Take a careful look around the facility and evaluate it in terms of general maintenance, cleanliness, lighting and overall atmosphere.

Note the demeanor of the staff and how they interact with residents.

Make note of safety features designed to prevent wandering and personal injury.

Ask about the planned activities and talk to the recreational supervisor. Make note of any special activities designed to reduce anxiety or agitation.

What's your impression of the grooming and appearance of the residents? Do they look clean, healthy, and content?

Visit the dining room during meal times. Is the food wholesome and appetizing? Are residents getting needed help with feeding?

Speak with current residents and their families about the facility's quality of care. Do this privately, if possible, to ensure candid answers to your questions.

Take lots of notes, as you will want to refer to them later.

Making a Smooth Transition

Once you've decided on a residential facility, one way to ease the transition is through a short-term respite stay. Respite stays may last for a weekend, a few days or even longer, depending on the facility's policy and your particular situation. During his or her stay, your loved one will receive all of the care and services available to permanent residents, and become familiar with the staff and environment. Equally important, you will have an opportunity to evaluate your loved one's reaction and determine if there's a good "fit" before making a long-term commitment.

Even with a superior facility, understand that there will be an adjustment period, during which your loved one may resent being sent to "a home" and exhibit a wide range of worrisome behaviors. You can help your loved one make a smooth transition by providing the staff with as much personal background as possible. Discuss successful adjustment strategies with the facility, and keep your loved one involved to the greatest degree possible. To help your loved one feel more at home, put familiar items in his or her room. Include family pictures, a favorite chair, cards made by grandchildren or other treasured mementos.

Once the initial adjustment period has passed, try to visit regularly and encourage other family members and friends to do so as well. Whenever possible, attend programmed activities with your loved one to stay connected and engaged in his or her life. Inform the facility that you will want to participate in monthly care planning meetings, which can be mutually informative and rewarding.

Moving a loved one to a residential facility is never an easy decision, but in the case of dementia patients, it is often the only realistic solution for all concerned. Moreover, when that choice results in access to highly specialized care and programming, a safe, secure environment, and a continued sense of dignity and respect, it is also a loving decision.

Helpful Resources

To receive additional complimentary copies of this pamphlet and others in our ongoing educational series on dementia care, memory loss and brain health, call the facility nearest you, or download copies online. Choose from the following titles:



- ▶ **Residential Care Options for Loved Ones with Dementia:** *Making a choice you both can live with*
- ▶ **Maintaining Memory:** *Tips and techniques for keeping your gray matter in the pink*
- ▶ **Memory Loss Caregiving:** *Enhancing the care and quality of life for someone with memory loss*

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Residential Care Options for Loved Ones with Dementia

*Making a choice
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When Residential Care Becomes Unavoidable

Deciding whether the time has come to place a loved one in a long-term care facility, regardless of his or her condition, is always difficult. However, when faced with a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or other form of progressive dementia, the need to seek residential care is generally a matter of "when" rather than "if." While a spouse or family member may be willing to take on the role of caregiver, eventually the affected individual will almost always require more attention than can be provided at home. With that in mind, it is wise to begin planning for long-term care well before a sudden downturn or medical emergency makes the need immediate.

This pamphlet is designed to provide some basic guidelines for choosing the most appropriate and best option when the time comes to seek full-time residential care. Gaining a better understanding of this important process now will help make any future transition as smooth and stress free as possible.



Events and Red Flags that Signal the Need for Residential Care

A medical crisis, such as a broken hip or serious illness that may or may not be directly related to a loved one's dementia, but significantly impacts his or her ability to continue to live at home

Persistent and escalating safety concerns like wandering away from home, leaving the stove on or doors unlocked

Behavioral and/or personal care issues that pose risks to other family members, including:



- ▶ Combativeness
- ▶ Acting out or erratic behavior
- ▶ Extreme mood swings
- ▶ Incontinence
- ▶ Difficulty with feeding

Residential Dementia Care Options

In choosing residential care, you will be addressing the medical, personal care, emotional and social needs of your loved one. There are several options to consider. The following brief descriptions will give you a basic understanding of the most readily available alternatives.

Assisted Living Facilities – Assisted living facilities that accept individuals with dementia bridge the gap between living independently and living in a skilled nursing facility. Suitable residents must have a reasonably high degree of independence, since support is limited. Typical services include meals, medication management and help with personal care and activities of daily living. Unless they are directly associated with a skilled nursing center, residents will likely be required to move from the facility as his or her disease progresses. The federal government does not regulate assisted living facilities and operating requirements vary from state to state.

Skilled Nursing Facilities – For patients in mid and advanced stages of dementia, skilled nursing facilities provide trained round-the-clock care, supervision and personal assistance. In addition to quality nursing care, services include specialized dementia programming, medication management, social services, therapeutic and recreational activities, rehabilitation and complex clinical care as needed. Skilled nursing facilities are usually licensed by the state and regulated by the federal government.



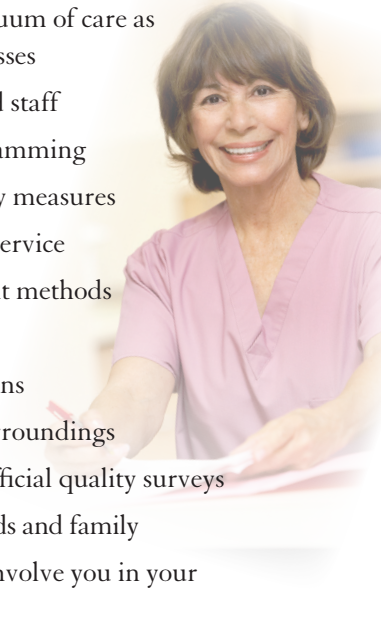
Specialized Dementia Care Units – Designed to meet the specific needs of residents with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, these dedicated units or wings are generally found within a larger residential care facility. Specialized free-standing facilities may also be part of a continuing care community or campus setting.

Planning Ahead

Even if you are still months – or even years – away from actively choosing a residential facility, once a diagnosis of Alzheimer's has been made, you are wise to plan ahead. By doing the research early on, you avoid the pressure of having to "rush to judgment." Also keep in mind that your preferred facilities may have waiting lists, and by getting your foot in the door early, chances are that when the need arises, you will get greater consideration. Remember, too, that your loved one will no doubt worry about the future as the disease progresses. Involving him or her in the process while cognitive abilities are still at a reasonably high level will add greatly to peace of mind.

Once you are ready to begin your research, make a checklist of the factors you are looking for in a residential facility. Some that you might want to consider include:

- ▶ Services and capabilities appropriate to your loved one's needs
- ▶ Access to a continuum of care as the disease progresses
- ▶ A specially trained staff
- ▶ Specialized programming
- ▶ Security and safety measures
- ▶ Food and dining service
- ▶ Rates and payment methods
- ▶ Licensure
- ▶ Religious affiliations
- ▶ Pleasant, clean surroundings
- ▶ Performance in official quality surveys
- ▶ Proximity to friends and family
- ▶ A willingness to involve you in your loved one's care



Getting Referrals

There are several ways to begin your search. One is simply by speaking openly with friends and co-workers. Do they know someone with Alzheimer's who required residential care? If so, what has been their experience with a particular facility? Was it positive or negative? What made it so? Was their loved one comfortable there? Personal referrals are often the best place to get started.

Another good reference is your local chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. Call and ask for a list of facilities that accept dementia patients and the names of those that have an especially high level of experience or expertise in dementia care. Other professional referral sources may include your family doctor or local hospital. The Internet and your public library are also potentially valuable resources.