

How to Choose a Nursing Home: Brief Version

What is a nursing home?

Sometimes people have an illness or condition that makes it hard for them to live at home. A nursing home is a place where people can live while getting nursing and personal care.

People live in nursing homes for many different reasons.

- They may need to stay for a short time after surgery, stroke, or other illness.
- Their caregivers at home may need a break.
- They may need long-term medical care.
- It is not safe for them to live alone.
- They may be dying and need comfort care.

What kinds of care do nursing homes give?

All nursing homes should offer these kinds of care:

- Nurses to give medicine, take care of wounds, and give other types of medical care
- Doctors who visit routinely or as often as needed
- Staff to help with personal care, like eating, going to the bathroom, and dressing
- Therapists to help with things like exercise, daily tasks, and speaking
- Meals and a safe place to live
- Programs to help meet social and spiritual needs

What should I look for in a nursing home?

A good nursing home should:

- Be safe, comfortable, and clean.
- Encourage the people who live there to make choices and do things for themselves
- Help with activities that they can no longer do alone
- Keep track of their health
- Make sure they get the care and diet needed

How do I choose a nursing home?

Start by visiting different nursing homes close to friends and family. You can get a list of nursing homes from a hospital social worker or the local Agency on Aging.

Phone each nursing home you are thinking about.

- Ask about waiting lists and what is needed to be admitted.
- Ask for a visit.

Visit the nursing homes.

- Visit at different times of the day without calling first.
- Look at all areas of the home.
- Talk to the people who live there and their families to find out how they like the care.

Think about:

- What the home looks like. Does it feel safe and comfortable? Would you like to live there?
- What services and programs they offer. Are there enjoyable activities?
- What the staff is like
- How good the food is

Try to see if the people who live in the nursing home are well cared for.

- Are they clean, well-groomed, and dressed in clean clothing?
- Does the staff treat people living in the nursing home with respect?

Talk with the administrator.

Make an appointment to meet with the administrator. This gives you a chance to ask many questions. Here are some of the things you may want to ask:

- Is the nursing home Medicaid or Medicare certified?
- How do you handle emergencies? Is there always a doctor to call? Is there always a nurse in the building?
- Can you care for people with special needs?
- Do you have a written list of the services and supplies that are included in the basic rate? What services and supplies cost extra?

Also ask for:

- A copy of the admission contract. Ask about anything you don't understand. Get advice from a lawyer if you need it. See about changing the contract to better suit your needs.
- Ask for a copy of the latest state survey. This shows the latest inspection of the nursing home. Make sure that the home has corrected any major problems.

Choosing a nursing home is not easy. But by looking at all your choices, you and your loved one can make the best choice.

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