

Your handy guide to selecting a care home





Who is this guide for?

This guide is for people affected by dementia to help with choosing a suitable care home. It suggests some issues to think about and questions that may be useful to ask staff when visiting potential care homes.

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Introduction

Good quality care that preserves dignity, treats people with respect and promotes independence can improve the lives of care home residents with dementia. Choosing the right care home is critical and this guide lists some key questions to think about when visiting different homes.

Alzheimer's Society produces several factsheets in this area which you may find of interest. For information about different types of care homes, and how to find a home in your area, see factsheet **476 Selecting a care home**. For information on contributing towards the costs of care, see factsheet **468 Paying care home fees**. Some people may also find our factsheet **482 Moving into a care home – advice for lesbian, gay and bisexual people** useful.

You can download copies of these at www.alzheimers.org.uk/factsheets

Things to think about when visiting care homes

When visiting a care home, spend some time looking around and talking to the person in charge, as well as other staff and residents. Don't be afraid to ask questions. It may help to use the checklists in this guide as you go around the care home and check off the points. Feel free to add any other questions that you want to ask.

Care home details

Care home name: _____

Contact name and role: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Website: _____

1. First impressions

First impressions are often an important clue as to how a home is run. For example:

Checklist

Are you greeted in a friendly way when you arrive?

Is the atmosphere homely and welcoming?

Is it clean and pleasantly decorated and furnished?

Are there any unpleasant smells?

Is the home well ventilated?

2. Location

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Will it be easy for visitors to get to the home?



Are there facilities such as shops, transport links, a park, a place of worship or a pub within walking distance, for residents who enjoy going out?



Is there much noise from traffic, or anything else?



3. Access

If the person with dementia is likely to need equipment or adaptations:

Checklist

Are the corridors and toilets wide enough for a walking frame or wheelchair?

Are there suitably adapted toilets and baths?

Are there ramps or a lift? How easy is it to enter and leave the building, and to move between the rooms and floors?

Are external doors kept locked?

4. Residents

The best indication of a good home is that the residents appear happy and responsive, and that individuals are treated with dignity and respect:

Checklist

Do staff speak to residents in a way the residents and you like?

Are residents involved in activities or chatting?

Are residents properly dressed and well groomed?

Can residents choose which clothes to wear each day?

Do residents seem alert and interested?

Do residents talk to you as you walk around?

Are residents encouraged to do as much for themselves as they can – and, if so, can you see any examples of this?

Is there a residents' committee?

5. Bedrooms

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Can residents have a single room?

Are residents encouraged to bring in some of their own furniture and possessions?

Are the bedrooms bright and pleasant?

Can residents go to their rooms when they wish to be alone?

Can residents keep pets in their rooms, or in other areas of the home?

Do staff respect people's right to privacy, eg knock on bedroom doors?

Is there somewhere for visitors to sit in the room?

Is there adequate storage space?

Is there access to a telephone?

6. Toilets

Getting to the toilet in time can sometimes be a problem as dementia progresses:

Checklist

Are there enough toilets within easy reach of the bedrooms and living areas?



Are staff trained to spot the signs when someone needs to go to the toilet?



Are staff cheerful and tactful about helping residents use the toilet and changing them if they are incontinent?



When are incontinence pads and catheters used?



7. Living areas

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Are chairs arranged in groups to encourage talking, rather than placed in a circle around the outside of the room?

Is there a TV or radio left on when no-one is watching or listening?

Is there more than one room where residents can sit or where they can be quiet or see visitors?

Are there smoking and non-smoking areas?

Is there a garden where residents can walk safely when they want?

Are there telephone facilities for private use?

Can residents access the internet either in their room or on a shared computer?

Are books and newspapers available?

8. Meals

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Are special diets catered for, and are residents' likes and dislikes taken into account?

Is a choice of food offered at mealtimes?
Can you see the current menu?

Can residents eat in their rooms, or eat at different times, if they prefer?

Are there facilities for making snacks if a resident feels peckish?

Are staff trained to sensitively help people eat their food, if necessary?

9. Health and care

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Which doctors can residents see?

Does the home have access to other services, such as community mental health teams, chiropractors, opticians and dentists?

Can a relative stay overnight if a resident is unwell?

What happens if residents need help with taking medication?

Are changes in medication discussed with the family carers?

What happens if a resident is unwell or needs medication?

What will happen if a resident's needs change?

9. Health and care (continued)

Checklist

What support is available for planning for care in the future, and to make sure these plans are put into place?



If a resident's needs increase, could they be supported to stay in the home through to the end of life?



What support or care is given to family or other carers?



Can residents choose how often they have a bath or shower?



10. Visitors

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

Is there good communication between relatives and the home; are phone calls and visits encouraged?

Are visitors welcomed at any time?

Are there quiet areas where relatives can spend time with residents?

Are visitors encouraged to take residents out, or join them for a meal?

Can visitors make a drink for themselves and the resident?

Are children made to feel welcome?

Is information readily shared with families?
How is this done?

10. Visitors (continued)

Checklist

Are families supported to become involved in the life of the home – for example, is there a relatives' group?



Are families able to spend time with the resident as their needs and requirements change, especially towards the end of life? For instance, is there somewhere a family member could stay overnight if desired?



11. Activities

Residents should be stimulated without feeling stressed:

Checklist

Does the home provide personalised activities that are suitable and engaging for residents with dementia?

Are there opportunities for residents to help staff with small tasks if they wish?

Are activities available each day or are residents left to sit in front of the TV?

Are trips and outings organised and special events celebrated?

Are residents encouraged to take exercise?

Are residents able to choose and listen to a variety of music when they feel like it?

Can residents go to bed if they want?



12. Security and safety

It is important to consider the following options:

Checklist

What security measures are in place to keep residents safe?

What measures are taken to reduce the risk of falls?

What call systems are in place if the person needs help?

13. Cultural differences

If the person with dementia comes from a different background or culture from most other residents, you might enquire about how their needs could be catered for in a sensitive way:

Checklist

Are staff interested in learning about the person's background, relationships, emotional needs and culture?



Do staff show a respect for differences that might involve diet, clothing, hygiene practices or religious observances, for example?



Will the resident's culture and beliefs be respected throughout their time there, including any particular spiritual needs at the end of life?



Do staff find out how residents wish to be addressed, and how they prefer to relate to other people?



Do staff speak the resident's language?



14. Staff

It is important to note whether staff seem friendly and caring towards residents and whether they treat residents with respect:

Checklist

Do staff have any training and experience in dementia care?

Do staff make time to sit and chat to residents, or talk to them while they are helping them with physical tasks such as washing and dressing?

How do staff learn about residents' backgrounds, relationships, habits and interests?

Will the person with dementia have a member of staff particularly responsible for their care?

Is there a member of staff to discuss any concerns? How can they be contacted?

Does the manager have a friendly manner with staff and residents?

14. Staff (continued)

Checklist

Does the manager have knowledge of dementia and can they deal with difficulties that may arise in an understanding way?



Is there a full assessment before a resident moves into the home?



Does each resident have a care plan?
How regularly are their needs reviewed?



Is the family carer consulted about the care plan and about any proposed changes to it?



15. Other considerations

If the care home is being arranged through the local authority, the local authority will have a contract with the home. You may want to see a copy.

If you are arranging a home independently, make sure you have a contract with the home or a statement in writing. Get advice from a solicitor or Citizens Advice Bureau before signing any agreement. The contract normally covers:

Checklist

What is included in the weekly fee, what may be charged as 'extras' and how much notice is given if fees are raised?



What kind of care, and what services, can residents expect?



What happens if a resident's condition deteriorates – can they remain in the home and, if not, how are alternative arrangements made?



How much notice does each party need to give?





Additional notes

For details of Alzheimer's Society services in your area and information about a wide range of dementia-related topics, visit our website at alzheimers.org.uk

Based on Alzheimer's Society factsheet **476 Selecting a care home**.

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Alzheimer's Society is the UK's leading support and research charity for people with dementia, their families and carers. We provide information and support to people with any form of dementia and their carers through our publications, National Dementia Helpline, website, and more than 2,000 local services. We campaign for better quality of life for people with dementia and greater understanding of dementia. We also fund an innovative programme of medical and social research into the cause, cure and prevention of dementia and the care people receive.

If you have any concerns about Alzheimer's disease or any other form of dementia, visit alzheimers.org.uk or call the **Alzheimer's Society National Dementia Helpline** on **0300 222 11 22**. (Interpreters are available in any language. Calls may be recorded or monitored for training and evaluation purposes.)

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