



Choosing a Good Nursing Home: A Consumer's Checklist

When you are considering a nursing home for yourself or a loved one, you want to find one that is a bright, comfortable, and inviting place to live. You want a home that provides a variety of stimulating activities and has a history of providing good care to residents. It should be a place where family members are invited to participate in activities and meals. Some nursing homes offer additional services, such as outpatient rehabilitation services; temporary, short-term recovery assistance; respite care; assisted living; specialized care units; and hospice services.

Getting started

- Contact your local Area Agency on Aging for local ombudsman contact information. An ombudsman is an advocate for nursing home residents and a resource for consumers. The ombudsman will provide free information on the facilities, including the results of the most recent state inspections, strengths, special services, and patterns of complaints received by the ombudsman office.
- Obtain a list of facilities in your desired location. Call the facilities you are interested in. Don't wear yourself out visiting facilities that do not have openings. Be prepared to briefly describe the care requirements of the person in need of placement, including such challenging behaviors as wandering, aggressiveness or psychiatric concerns.
- Make an appointment to visit the facility. If you like a facility, make a second unannounced visit, preferably on a weekend or in the evening.

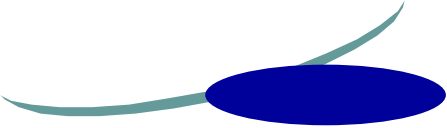
Some general things to look for in a facility

- Is the facility clean? Are odors pervasive throughout the facility or in isolated areas? Are the odors temporary?
- Look at the residents' rooms. Are they clean, comfortable, and home-like?
- Are the closets adequate? Do the drawers and closet doors open easily and safely?
- Ask to see a resident bathroom. (*Do not enter a resident's room without permission from the resident or tour guide.*) Is the bathroom clean and organized? Are the toiletries and personal items stored appropriately? Are towels and wash clothes available?
- Do residents have easy access to a private telephone in a quiet place? Is the telephone equipped with a hearing-enhancement device?
- Can you easily find posted instructions on how to contact the ombudsman, the County Health Department, and Adult Protective Services in the County Department of Social [Human] Services?
- Are pleasant areas available for private dining and family visits?

Observe and talk with the residents

- Are the residents clean, well groomed, and positioned comfortably?
- Are the residents up and active during the day? Are they engaged in activities or interacting with people in common areas?
- Visit with the residents. Ask them how they like the food, if they feel well cared for, and if they have enough to do. Tell them that you are thinking about bringing someone to live there. Ask them if they like living there and would they recommend it to others.

Mealtime observations

- Look in the dining areas during a meal. Are residents who need help being assisted in eating? Are adaptive devices, such as special utensils and dishes, used when appropriate?
 - Are people served their meals promptly?
 - Do the menus posted reflect what the residents are eating?
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Pay attention to the staff and service provided

- Observe the interaction between the residents and staff.
- How do staff members address the residents? It is usually not appropriate to address adults as “honey” or “sweetie.” Some residents like to be called by their first name, others prefer the formality of Mr. or Mrs.
- Do staff members respect the resident’s privacy? Do they knock at the resident’s door and wait for a response before entering?
- Are privacy curtains pulled and/or doors closed when personal care is provided?
- Are call lights within residents’ reach and are they answered within a few minutes?
- Is water available at the bedside for the residents? Are cups available and can residents easily get a drink of water? Ask how the facility ensures that each resident receives enough water every day.
- Are staff members wearing identification badges?
- Do staff members acknowledge your presence? If you are visiting without a tour guide, someone should tactfully inquire about your presence at the facility.
- Do staff members look calm, well organized, and attentive to the residents?

Become informed about the facility’s management and administration

- Read the most recent state survey regarding the facility. This report provides results from the annual licensing inspection conducted by the state’s Department of Public Health and Environment.
- Find out the name of the management company that operates the facility. Ask what other facilities this company operates in the region. You may want to review the health department surveys for these facilities to see if the company consistently provides good care. Surveys and complaints against a facility are available for public viewing at www.healthfacilities.info. For more information, call the Health and Facilities Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment at 303-692-2800.
- Meet the administrator, the social worker, and the director of nursing of the facility. Ask how long they have worked at the facility. Be alert to frequent administrative changes. These are the people who will ultimately be responsible for correcting any concerns or complaints that you or the resident may have.
- Ask how complaints are addressed and how problems are resolved. Find out which staff person has been designated as the person to handle grievances.

Understand the payment system of the facility

- If the prospective resident will be paying personally, ask to see an itemized list of the daily charges and clarify the billing procedures for additional items. For example, many facilities include personal care items such as incontinence pads, toothpaste, rubber gloves, and tissues in the residents’ daily rate. However, some facilities do not cover these items and can legally increase their cost if they provide them. You can save some expense by providing such items yourself.
- It is important to know you have the right to purchase medications at the pharmacy of your choice, but you are then responsible for either delivering the medication yourself or ensuring that the pharmacy will deliver the medications in a timely manner.
- Ask how money for the resident’s personal needs is handled. The facility should provide banking services and quarterly statements for residents. Money for personal needs funds amounting to \$50 or more must be in interest-bearing accounts.
- Medicare will pay for a limited amount of time in a nursing home depending on the rehabilitative needs of the resident. If the resident continues to stay in the facility and requires Medicaid assistance, it is important to choose a facility that accepts both forms of payment (Medicare and Medicaid) and can ensure a Medicaid bed will be available; otherwise the resident will be required to move to another facility that accepts Medicaid.



Reference:

“The Ombudsman Guide to Choosing a Good Nursing Home – A Consumers Checklist, Denver Regional Council of Governments, 303-455-1000