



Nursing home checklist

Choosing a nursing home for a family member can be one of the most difficult decisions you make. The Registry of U.S. Nursing Homes (memberofthefamily.net/usregistry.htm) lists 16,000 homes alphabetically by state, with results of the past three government surveys for each home. Once you've narrowed down your candidate list, make several copies of the following checklist and fill in one for each nursing home you are considering.

Nursing home: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Contact: _____

Credentials and overall environment

Is the facility certified by Medicare and Medicaid? Yes No

How long has the facility been certified? _____

Has the facility had stable ownership for some time, with the same administrator and director? Yes No

Is a statement of residents' rights clearly posted? Yes No

Does the facility have an Alzheimer's unit or other special-care area restricted to residents with special-care needs? Yes No

Is this specialty unit separated from other areas of the facility? Yes No

Is the facility well lit, clean, safe, and welcoming? Yes No

Location and visiting

Frequent visits generally will improve the resident's mental and emotional well-being and ensure that quality-of-care issues can be addressed as they arise.

Is the facility convenient to the resident's family members and friends? Yes No

What are the visiting hours? _____

Are family visits welcomed? Yes No

Are there restrictions on visits by children? Yes No

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Are family members allowed to take residents out for a day or overnight? Yes No

Are there areas where family and friends can visit privately? Yes No

Is the facility close to the office of the resident's doctor? Yes No

Is the facility convenient to public transportation? Yes No

Mental and emotional well-being

Are mental health services available? Yes No

Are activities planned each day for the residents? Yes No

Are events regularly scheduled? (Ask to look at the schedule.) Yes No

Are there activities for residents who can't leave their beds? Yes No

Is there a library available for residents, with large-print and audio books? Yes No

Is there a small store for purchasing personal items, such as shaving cream, hair care products, and snacks? Yes No

Are residents able to enjoy outdoor areas, such as an enclosed garden? Yes No

Are plants, pets, and other natural elements added to the residents' environment? Yes No

Are residents taken to special community events and cultural activities? Yes No

Rooms

Will the resident share a room and/or a bathroom with one or more other residents? Yes No

How are roommates and rooms selected?

If the resident is dissatisfied, can roommates be changed? Yes No

How is this accomplished?

Can the resident bring some of his or her own furniture and decorations? Yes No

Is drinking water readily available? Yes No

Are nurse and emergency call buttons within easy reach of bed, toilet, and bath? Yes No

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The resident's care plan

Individual care plans must be implemented for each resident.

How often is the care plan reviewed and changed?

What is the protocol for handling problems?

Are there regular fire drills?

Yes No

What bathing facilities are available, and how is bathing handled when the person needs assistance?

Nursing home employees

How are employees selected?

Are employees screened for drug use, criminal records, or other potential problems?

Yes No

What is the turnover rate for skilled employees?

What is the turnover rate for employees who perform ancillary services, such as meal preparation and financial recordkeeping?

Are registered nurses or licensed practical nurses on duty at all times?

Yes No

Is a trained social worker on staff?

Yes No

What is the ratio of staff to residents during each shift?

(Ideally, a facility will have one nurse's aide for every five or six residents between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m.)

Does the staff treat residents with respect?

Yes No

Can you talk privately to residents to ask what they think of the facility?

Yes No

Are staff members available to talk if you have a question about a loved one's care?

Yes No

Medical care

Is there is a physician used by the majority of residents?

Yes No

What are his/her qualifications?

How often is the doctor on the premises?

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Does the doctor have a good bedside manner with residents? Yes No

May residents use their personal physician if they choose? Yes No

Are there arrangements with a nearby hospital in the event of a medical emergency? Yes No

What diagnostic treatment facilities are available at the facility?

Meals

Eating is both a necessity and a pleasure that continues even when we're unable to enjoy much else.

Are meals served in a communal dining room or is each resident brought meals in his or her room?

If communal, how are tables assigned in the dining room?

How long does it take for a meal to be delivered to a bedridden resident?

How does the food taste, and how is it presented to the resident?

Is there a way to heat food that has become cold? Yes No

Can you stay for a meal? (This will help you gauge the quality of the food service.) Yes No

Admission requirements

What financial information will the facility require during the admissions process?

Can the resident or his representative have copies in advance of all admissions documents and contracts for review? Yes No

How long does the admissions process take?

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Cost of care

What is included in the cost of care?

How are extra items billed?

Can laundry be taken off premises? Yes No

Does this save the resident some costs? Yes No

How are prescription drugs handled?

What is the cost difference between a private room and a semiprivate room?

Transportation services

If required nonemergency medical services are not available on premises (such as dialysis), how is transportation arranged?

What about transportation to other places, such as local stores and religious services?

Resources

CareScout carescout.com
An unbiased source for ratings and reviews of eldercare providers nationwide. Detailed, 7-to 10-page nursing home reports are available for a small fee and include information on quality, resident population profiles, and health violations.

ElderLawAnswers elderlawanswers.com
Offers tips on choosing a facility, talking with family about placement, residents' rights, and resolving disputes. Also lists qualified elder law attorneys nationwide.

Nursing Home INFO nursinghomeinfo.com
Offers a facility search function, a needs assessment survey to help you determine the type of facility you should be looking for, and explains what a nursing home is and what types of services are provided.

Silin, Peter S., *Nursing Homes: The Family's Journey*. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

Burger, Sarah, Editor, *Nursing Homes: Getting Good Care There*. (Impact Publishers, 2001)

Rantz, Marilyn, et al. *The New Nursing Homes: A 20-Minute Way to Find Great Long-Term Care*. (Fairview Press, 2001)

Charlap, Steven S., M.D., *Making Sense of Nursing Homes: A Guide for Families*. (Age Sense, 2002)

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