

## How to Evaluate an Assisted Living Facility

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Choosing an assisted living facility can be difficult. You want to make sure you are selecting the place that best suits your needs or the needs of your loved one. There are a number of steps you can take to evaluate assisted living facilities and choose the one that is right for you.

**Assess your needs.** Before you can choose the right facility, you need to determine your physical, monetary, and everyday life needs. What is going to be important to you in an assisted living home? Separate the "must haves" from "wants" and prioritize your list of requirements. Once you have established exactly what you are looking for, you can begin evaluating facilities.

**Take a tour of the facility.** Check out the rooms to see whether they are clean and nicely decorated. Make sure residents can decorate their own rooms. Observe the safety and security procedures; for example, look for sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers. Also, note if there are security measures for Alzheimer's and dementia patients. Don't forget to go outdoors and check the grounds to see if there is room to walk around.

**Study the fees and the contract.** Make sure you understand what services are included in the monthly fee. Find out what is available for an extra fee. Take the contract home to look at it thoroughly. Better yet, have the contract reviewed by an elder law attorney.

**Know your provider.** What is the provider's background and experience? The provider is the person or entity legally responsible for providing the housing and operating the facility. Make sure that the provider is financially sound. Review any accreditations the facility claims to have.

**Find out about the staff.** How many staff members are there? The lower the staff-to-patient ratio, the better. Find out how the staff is trained and how long they have been with the facility. Ask to see staff training manuals if you can. Find out how the facility hires staff. Do they do criminal background checks and check references? Observe the staff in action. Stay for mealtime or for an activity to see how the staff treats residents. Ask to stay overnight; some facilities allow prospective residents and/or their families to stay overnight to assess the facility.

**Review the medical services.** Some facilities may offer free transportation to the doctor. Others may have medical personnel on staff. Check to see if the facility offers or can arrange delivery of prescriptions. In addition, at some facilities residents can purchase basic medical supplies (such as insulin) onsite. Find out what happens if a resident's health deteriorates. What type of assessments are done to determine your needs and to establish a plan of care for meeting those needs.

**Find out what types of activities are offered.** Look at the upcoming activity schedule to see if there are activities you or your loved one would be interested in. Do they have offsite as well as onsite activities? Do they have activities for family members to participate in? If religious services are important, find out if the facility offers services onsite or at a nearby location.

The selection of an assisted living facility and the decision to move into one is an emotional experience. It is critical for you to take the time to ensure that you are making the right choice. After all, this will become your new home and you want to be as comfortable as possible.