



advice and support for older age

**Independent
Age**

Guide

Guide 19

Care homes: what to look for

If you need to move into a care home, it is important to consider your choices carefully.

This guide aims to help you make an informed decision about the care home you would like to live in and provides a practical checklist of things to consider.

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1 Types of care home

Care homes can be run by local councils, businesses or voluntary organisations. They may offer respite care, temporary care or permanent placements.

All care homes provide personal care for people if they can no longer manage in their own home. This might include help with washing, dressing, bathing, getting in/out of bed, going to the toilet, taking medicine and providing meals.

When choosing a care home it is important that you know what type of care home you require and have had a needs assessment. There are three types of residential home: care homes, nursing homes and Elderly Mentally Infirm (EMI), which are homes for people who need specialist nursing care for mental health difficulties, such as Alzheimer's disease or dementia.

If you think you may need to go into a care home, your first step should be to contact the social services department of your local council, or the hospital social worker if you are in hospital, and request a 'needs assessment'. The care manager or social worker will carry out the needs assessment to establish what your care needs are and whether you need to go into a care home or if your needs could be met elsewhere (for example, in extra care housing or by having care workers visit you at home). For more information about the needs assessment, see our guide *Assessment and services from your local council in England* (Guide 12).

2 How to find the right care home

There are a number of ways to find information about care homes. If you have been assessed by social services, they should provide you with information about suitable care homes in your area. The Elderly Accommodation Counsel (0800 377 7070, housingcare.org) can also provide you with information about care homes and other types of accommodation (such as extra care housing) across England.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) (03000 616161, cqc.org.uk) can provide you with a list of care homes across England. You can contact the Care Inspectorate (0845 600 9527, careinspectorate.com) for a list of care homes in Scotland. The Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW) (0300 7900 126, cssiw.org.uk) can provide a list of care homes in Wales.

To help you decide which care home is right for you, it may be useful to have a look at the care home's latest inspection report. You can obtain a copy from the Care Quality Commission in England, the Care Inspectorate in Scotland and the CSSIW in Wales (see details above) as these are the regulatory bodies responsible for inspecting care homes. The inspection report should give you details about whether the care home has met essential standards of quality and safety.

Since 2010, care homes in England no longer receive star ratings from the CQC. Instead, there may be websites that invite people to review or rate care homes, such as carehomes.co.uk and goodcareguide.co.uk.

Trial periods

If you have chosen a care home, it is helpful to move in for a trial period to check if it is suitable. This will give you more time to see if you want to make the care home your permanent home. If social services has agreed to a trial stay, they should review your care after the trial stay to make sure you are happy to stay there and that your needs are still being met.

3 Care home fees

If you are paying your own fees, you can make your own arrangements to move into a care home, but we strongly recommend that you ask for your needs to be assessed by your local social services as you still have a right to an assessment and a statement of your needs despite your income and savings. Social services can advise whether they think you need care and, if so, what type of care home. This is important because when your savings eventually reduce to the upper capital threshold (currently £23,250), social services then has a responsibility to help you with your care home fees.

If the financial assessment shows that social services should contribute towards your care home fees, you should receive a written statement of your individual needs, describing how your needs will be met. This is known as your 'care plan'. You should also be given a list of care homes that will accept the 'standard rate' or usual cost of the local council, which is the amount that the local council is willing to pay up to for your assessed level of care needs. For more information on the setting of standard rates and third party top-ups, see our guide Care home fees: third party top ups (Guide 17).

If you are assessed as needing care in a nursing care home, you may be entitled to receive a nursing care payment of £109.79 per week from the NHS towards your care home fees. For more information, see our guide Care Home Fees: paying them in England (Guide 16).

Some people with complex health needs are entitled to have their care home fees paid for in full by the NHS. This is known as NHS Continuing Healthcare funding. For more information about the assessment process for NHS Continuing Healthcare, see our guide [Continuing Healthcare: should the NHS be paying for my care?](#) (Guide 27).

You may wish to consider the following when choosing a care home:

- what the local social services usually pay for the type of care you need in a care home (this is called their 'standard' or 'usual' rate). The majority of care homes charge a reduced rate if an older person is being paid for by the council
- looking for a care home that charges the same or near to what the local council usual pays as their 'standard' rate, even if you are paying for your own care home fees in full. This means that if your capital reduces to the upper capital threshold and you become eligible for financial support from social services, you are living in a care home that they will consider paying for
- if there is a difference between the care home fee and how much the council will pay. If there is, even if you are entitled to full funding by the council, your relatives may have been asked to pay a 'top-up' of the difference in fees. See our guide [Care Home Fees: third party top-ups](#) (Guide 17)
- how often the care home increases its fees and what the procedure is. If you are self funding or paying a top-up, check that you will be able to afford regular fee increases and whether you have to move out of the care home if you cannot afford to pay the fee increase
- if you have to pay a deposit or any fees in advance

- what fees you have to pay if you need to move out of the care home for a short time, for example, for a holiday or to go into hospital
- what services the fee includes
- whether you have to pay an extra charge for things like laundry, hairdressing, chiropody, additional care (if your needs increase), leisure activities, incontinence pads, newspapers, toiletries, physiotherapy or transport to hospital for regular checkups
- whether you are eligible for free services such as chiropody, continence supplies and physiotherapy through the NHS. Find out from your GP, social services or the local Clinical commissioning Group (CCG).

Benefits and income

Moving into a care home may affect which benefits you receive and how much benefit you receive. You will need to inform the Pension Service (08456 060 265, thepensionsservice.gov.uk) and your local council when you move into a care home on a permanent or temporary basis. Contact the Disability Benefits Centre for further information on how your benefits are likely to be affected (0345 605 6055 for Attendance Allowance; 0345 850 3322 for Personal Independence Payment or 0345 712 3456 for Disability Living Allowance).

4 Contract with the care home

You should be provided either with a 'statement' of the terms and conditions of the care home if you move into a home which has been arranged through the social services department, or a contract if you are paying all the fees yourself.

The statement should set out the services provided, the facilities and the terms and conditions of the care home. The care home should also provide a service user's guide which includes:

- a description of the individual accommodation and communal space provided
- the services available to residents
- details of any special care it offers, for example, care of people with a mental illness such as dementia, or care for people with particular cultural or religious needs
- relevant qualifications and experience of the manager and staff
- a copy of the complaints procedure
- the service users' views of the home.

If you are given a contract, you should check carefully the terms you have to sign. Look for:

- which room you are to occupy
- whether there is a non-refundable deposit
- whether there is a reduction in the fee if you are away from the care home for any reason
- whether there is an arrangement to help you stay in the care home once your capital reduces if you are paying for your own fees

- the circumstances under which the care home can ask you to leave and how much notice will they give you
- who is responsible for finding you somewhere else to live if you do have to leave
- how much notice you need to give the care home if you want to move out
- when the charge for care stops after a resident dies.

If you are unhappy with any aspect of the contract you are being asked to sign, you could contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (

www.adviceguide.org.uk/england/consumer_e.htm, 08454 04 05 06) for further advice.

You can also obtain advice from the Relatives and Residents Association (relres.org), which supports care home residents and their families, and operates a helpline to give information and advice (020 7359 8136).

Questions to ask when choosing a care home

5 Your care needs

- Will you be involved in making decisions about your care?
- Will the care home involve your relatives in looking after you? (The home should only involve your relatives with your permission).
- Can the care home support your care needs?
- Do you have the freedom to wander in and around the home?
- Does the care home have all the equipment necessary for your care?
- Will you be able to look after yourself as much as possible to maintain your independence, including being in charge of your own medicine?
- Does the care home approach bathing, incontinence and giving medicine in a sensitive way?
- Can you go out when you want?
- Does the care home provide physiotherapy, chiropody or hairdressing?
- Do the residents get the chance to take part in decision-making about life generally in the care home?
- Is there a residents' committee?
- Will the care home regularly look at your needs and at how you are progressing?
- Can you look after your own personal affairs (such as money and benefits), and will the home give you privacy to do this?
- Will you be able to spend time alone in your room if you wanted to?
- Could you keep your own doctor if you move into the care home?

6 Staff at the care home

During your visit it is important to consider the staff in the care home as you will have contact with them on a daily basis. You may want to think about the following points:

- Does it look as if there are enough members of staff?
- Does the staff team seem too busy or do they have time to sit and spend time with residents?
- Do staff members help residents to do things for themselves or do they do things for them?
- When the staff members are assisting a resident, do they explain what they are going to do?
- Do the staff members treat residents with respect and dignity? Do they seem friendly and welcoming?

And you could ask the manager:

- if the care staff are expected to carry out domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning or whether there are separate staff for this
- what training the staff have
- if any of the staff speak your first language if this is not English
- which staff members have formal care qualifications. For example, do the care assistants have National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and are those involved in nursing Registered General Nurses (RGN) or State Registered Nurses (SRN)?
- if the staff are trained in handling techniques, for example, moving and handling residents. If not, they are not trained correctly.
- if the care home is compliant with the requirement to check members of staff with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales (or Disclosure Scotland if you live in Scotland).

7 Accommodation

During your visit, have a look at the facilities available in the home.

- Do the facilities and furnishings seem well looked after?
- Do you like the decoration? Would you feel comfortable living there?
- Has the care home got up-to-date equipment for the needs of the residents, for example, a lift, grab-rails, minicom loop system for people with hearing difficulties, bathroom hoists?
- Is there easy access for wheelchairs or frames throughout the home?
- Could you take your pets? Contact the Cinnamon Trust (01736 757900, cinnamon.org.uk) for a list of residential care homes where pets are accepted.
- Who would be expected to provide any extra equipment if your needs changed?
- Do they have facilities to store your disability equipment, for example, a mobility scooter?
- Are there plenty of public spaces where you can meet other residents and socialise if you want to?

Residents' rooms

- Are the rooms available as single or shared occupancy? If they are shared, how is privacy achieved?
- If there are shared rooms, did the residents choose to share? Both people in a shared room have to make the choice to share; you cannot be forced to share.
- Are any rooms en-suite with bath, shower or toilet?
- Are the rooms spacious?
- What is the temperature in the home? Are rooms warm and stuffy or cold and draughty?
- Do the rooms smell fresh and clean?

- Can you lock your room, and if this is not possible, is there a lockable drawer or cabinet within the room for your use?
- Do you need to obtain insurance for your belongings?
- How many items of furniture or personal possessions can you bring with you? Can you bring your own television with you?
- Is there mobile phone reception in your room?
- Who will pay for general wear and tear of the room (for example, the carpets getting soiled or frayed)?

Communal rooms

- Are there different sitting areas, including quiet rooms?
- Is there a separate dining area?
- Are there toilets within easy reach of all parts of the home?
- Are there smoking and non-smoking areas?
- Are there plenty of easily accessible call alarms to alert staff if you need assistance?
- Is there a television in the communal room?
- Do you have access to a radio or internet?

Location

- Is the care home near to your family and friends?
- Is it convenient for shops, public transport and your doctor?
- What is the surrounding area like?
- Are there parks and leisure facilities nearby?

8 Meals

Meals are an important aspect of the service provided in the care home. You may want to think about the following:

- can you look at copies of previous menus?
- do the meals seem nutritious?
- is there a choice of food available on the menu?
- how often do the menus change?
- are the residents involved in planning the menu?
- can they cater for you if you have a special diet?
- is the dining area attractive and large enough?
- can you choose who to sit with?
- can you have meals in your room?
- can your visitors eat with you?
- before you move into the care home, can you go there for a meal to see what it is like?
- can you be served extra portions if you still feel hungry?
- are the meals hot enough?
- is there flexibility about meal times?
- can you get snacks and drinks in-between meals if you require?
- can you prepare your own food and drinks when you wish?

9 Leisure activities

- Does the care home organise any leisure activities, for example, arts and crafts, exercise classes, games, walks, or days out?
- Can you choose whether to take part in leisure activities?
- Are residents involved in planning and organising these activities?
- Can you carry on doing things you currently enjoy - does the care home have the space and equipment to allow you to do this?
- Can you take part in activities outside the care home by yourself? Would the care home help with transport or staff if you needed it?
- Is there a garden or outdoor area which is accessible?
- Does the care home have its own transport?
- Will your religious needs be met? Do faith leaders call at the home, or can you be supported to attend a religious service?
- Does the home celebrate days or festivals that are important to you?
- Will the care home make it possible for you to vote in elections?
- Are there any volunteers or befrienders who visit?
- Can you have visitors at any time or are there a set visiting hours?
- Can you see visitors in private?
- Is it possible for visitors to stay overnight?
- What services does the care home provide, for example, TV, library, the internet or hairdressing?
- Would you be charged extra for any activities or services?
- Would you not be able to take part if you could not afford them?

10 Things to remember when choosing a care home

- Ask for a needs assessment from social services.
- Check how you will be able to pay for your fees.
- Consider which area you want to live in.
- Ask for a list of care homes in your preferred area.
- Find out as much as you can about the care homes, including asking for recent inspection reports.
- It is advisable to visit a number of care homes before making a decision.
- It may be helpful to visit the care home with a close friend or a relative so that you can compare notes and get a second opinion - it may be that they notice something about the care home that you missed.
- When visiting the care home you may not have a lot of time to decide if it is suitable so it is a good idea to prepare the questions you want to ask before you get there.
- You should try to visit the care home you have chosen before you move in. If this is not possible, you should be visited at home or in hospital by the care home manager to make sure that the care home is suitable.
- Check whether the care home has a vacancy available for you or if you will need to go on a waiting list.
- You should ask how often spaces become available; if it is a very small care home you may have to wait longer.

This guide is not a full explanation of the law and is aimed at people aged over 60.

If you need any of this information in another format (such as large-print or Braille), please contact our Information Manager on 020 7605 4294 or email comms@independentage.org

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