

Choosing a care home

Use this checklist when you're visiting a care home for the first time. The more information you have, the more confident you'll feel about making the best choice.

Name of care home: _____

Date: _____

Contact information: _____

TIPS FOR VIEWING A CARE HOME

- Make a shortlist in advance of the key questions you'd like answered as a priority.
- Try to visit with a family member or friend: one of you can focus on talking to staff/having the official tour, and the other can have a look around the place and talk to residents.
- Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions: the more information you have, the more confident you'll feel about making the right choice.
- Make a list of any follow-up questions you'd like to ask later on. It's helpful to discuss this sort of thing with someone else after the visit.
- It can be useful to make a second unannounced visit, ideally at a different time of day.
- Pay attention to what you see, hear and smell during your visit, and how the experience makes you feel. This is just as important as what you're told by the home's staff.

First impressions

- Are the buildings and the grounds well maintained?
- Is there a friendly and welcoming environment for residents and guests?
- Are individual rooms and the home in general clean and comfortable?
- Is the temperature comfortable throughout the building?
- Are there any unpleasant smells?
- Is there plenty of activity and conversation among staff and residents?
- Is there an adequate number of staff on duty?

Location

- Is it easy to reach the home by car or public transport?
- Are there adequate and accessible parking spaces?
- What's the surrounding area like?
- Are there useful facilities nearby, such as shops, parks and places of worship?

The room

- Can you view the room your loved one might be offered?
 - Does the room have a nice view?
 - Would they have to share a bathroom or bedroom at any time?
 - Would it be possible for them to move rooms later, if they wanted to?
 - Can they bring their own furniture and possessions?
 - Is there adequate storage space for clothing and other belongings?
 - Are there private/en suite bathroom facilities?
 - Is the room suitably adapted, including the bathroom?
Are there grab rails, for example, if needed?
 - Is there an emergency call system available in the room?
 - Is there wi-fi in the room and in public spaces around the home?
Is there a good mobile phone signal in the room?
 - Is the room equipped with power sockets, a TV or a telephone?
 - Is there somewhere secure to keep money and valuables?
 - Can residents lock their own room?
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Communal areas and facilities

- What security procedures are in place to keep residents safe and secure?
 - Are all rooms, corridors and other spaces accessible for someone using a walking frame or wheelchair?
 - Is the home well laid out, with clearly signposted areas? Is it easy to find your way around?
 - Is there a garden or other safe outdoor space that residents and guests can use? Are outdoor spaces easily accessible?
 - Is there a communal lounge with or without TV?
 - Is there a quiet area where residents can relax, without music or TV?
 - Is there a café or similar place where residents can meet with guests?
 - Are residents allowed their own pets, or can pets be brought to visit?
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Care and support

- Can the home meet the specific care needs of your loved one 24 hours a day?
- What procedures will the home follow to assess your loved one's care needs?
- Will there be ongoing assessment of their needs?
- If your loved one's condition should worsen, is the home equipped to cater for their changing needs?
- Can the home provide in-house nursing care if required?
- Are there other residents with similar care needs to your loved one?

CARE SERVICES DIRECTORY

Enter your postcode to search for care homes and other care services in your area. Use the shortlist feature to compare all your options in one place, or come back and view them later on. [which.co.uk/find-care](https://www.which.co.uk/find-care)

- Are residents and their families involved in decisions about their care?
 - What other specialised medical support is available, if any – dementia support, for example?
 - Is there a nearby GP practice that's responsible for residents' health care needs?
 - What other health care services can be arranged – optician, dentist, physio or chiropodist, for example?
 - What procedures does the home follow when dealing with accidents and emergencies, or when taking residents for hospital appointments?
 - What technology is available to keep residents safe, such as alarms and monitors?
 - What support is available for end of life (palliative) care?
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Day-to-day living

- Can residents go to their room if they want to be alone?
 - Will staff knock before entering a resident's room?
 - Is the home happy for you to be actively involved in your loved one's life – for example, could you do their hair or take them out to a café?
 - How flexible is the daily routine? Can guests choose the times they prefer to get up or go to bed? Are mealtimes flexible?
 - Who provides the food? Can you see a menu or even sample a meal?
 - Where is food served? Could a resident eat in their room if they wanted to?
 - Does the home cater for your loved one's dietary preferences – if they are vegan or vegetarian, or they require halal or kosher options, for example?
 - How does the home support residents to practise their religious or spiritual beliefs?
 - What steps does the home take to identify and respect the residents' cultural preferences?
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Activities and social life

- Is there a regular programme of activities to keep your loved one occupied, such as music therapy, arts and crafts, exercise or gardening?
- If not already available, can the home arrange activities that suit your loved one's interests?
- Are there any regular social activities that residents can take part in, such as trips and outings or family days?
- Are residents' life stories and interests recognised and celebrated – through photos, personal effects or paintings and drawings, for example?
- Is there an additional cost for any of the activities on offer?
- Does the home have active links with the local community?
- Does the home have its own transport services?

Staff

- What is the ratio of care workers to residents, both by day and at night, and on weekends?
 - Is there a supervisor on duty at all times?
 - What experience and qualifications do the manager and senior staff have?
 - What training do staff members get, including any specialised training for dementia, visual/hearing impairments and so on?
 - What's the turnover of staff? How many of the staff are long-serving?
 - Does the home use agency staff?
 - Are the staff friendly? Do they make time to talk to residents?
 - Will your loved one be allocated a dedicated staff member who's responsible for their care?
 - Can residents choose to have a male or female carer?
 - Does the home have policies in place to prevent discrimination?
 - If your loved one is not a native English speaker, is there anyone who can speak their language?
 - Do you recognise and support the needs of LGBT people?
Have staff members received any LGBT awareness training?
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Guests and visiting

- Are there set visiting times for guests?
 - Are children welcome?
 - Can guests stay overnight?
 - Can guests stay for meals? Is there a charge for this?
 - Are there any private rooms, other than bedrooms, where residents can meet with guests?
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Fees and contracts

- How are fees calculated? What do they include and exclude?
- When are fees collected? Are they paid in advance or in arrears?
What payment methods are accepted?
- Are there any additional charges, such as a management fee?
Is it a one-off fee or an annual payment?
- Is it necessary to make an advance payment or deposit? Is it refundable?
- If relevant, how are NHS-funded nursing care payments accounted for in the fee structure (they should be deducted from the overall fee)?
- Are residents tied in to the contract for a minimum period?
- How much notice must a resident give if they want to leave?

MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT FEES AND CONTRACTS

Once you've found a care home you're interested in, it's important to consider some more detailed questions about the fees and contract. Find more in-depth information about what to look for in a contract at [which.co.uk/care-home-contracts](https://www.which.co.uk/care-home-contracts).

Other practical issues

- Is there a waiting list? When would a room be available?
 - What would happen if the resident is a self-funder and they ran out of money? Could they stay at the home if the local authority were paying for the room? Would they stay in the same room?
 - What is the procedure for giving feedback or raising complaints?
 - What is the home's quality rating (from the CQC or another regional regulator) and when was their most recent inspection?
 - Does the home have a food hygiene standard rating?
 - Is there a residents' committee? How often does it meet?
 - Is there a family support group or regular relatives' meetings?
 - What is covered by the home's insurance policies?
 - Do they have an equality and diversity policy?
 - Have there been any instances of discrimination based on someone's sexual or gender identity? How have these been dealt with?
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Which? Later Life Care

Free, independent and practical advice about caring for older people across the UK.

Information on all aspects of planning care in later life - from staying independent and organising care at home to choosing a care home and putting finances in order.

Care services directory: search across the UK for local care homes, home care agencies and support groups.

Cost of care calculator: in a few short steps, find out how much care costs where you live and whether you're eligible for financial support.

Find out more at [which.co.uk/latelife](https://www.which.co.uk/latelife)



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