

Finding the right care home

Choosing a care home is a big decision. So it's worth taking your time, doing your research and visiting potential homes to find the best fit for you. The more information you have, the more confident you'll feel when you finally make your choice.

We've created this handy list of questions to ask when you're visiting care homes, to help you decide if it's right for you.

Our top tips

Bring someone with you

It's always a good idea to bring a friend or relative with you, so you can discuss everything after your visit with someone who has your welfare at heart.

Take your time

Don't let anyone rush you or your relative into making a decision. This is a big step and you and your family should be given the time you need to make the choice that's right for you.

However, do remember that there may be a waiting list so if you're happy that the care home meets all your needs then it's best to let them know sooner rather than later.

Take notes

Don't forget to take notes during your visit, so you can refer back to them. Maybe take this list with you to tick off as you go.

Get in touch

Make sure you confirm the contact details of the person you are speaking with, so if you do decide to go ahead you can contact them in the first instance.

Things to consider and questions to ask

1. General queries

- When will a space be available in the care home?
- Is there a waiting list for rooms?
- What level of care is available?
- Does the care home use agency staff? If so, how many and what is the ratio to permanent staff?
- How many staff are on duty during the day, and at night?
- Are the staff you meet friendly and sociable?
- Can all your care needs be met, even during the night?

- If your care needs increase in the future, such as change from residential care to nursing care, can the care home provide this?
- How much notice will you get if the services or levels of care are going to change?
- What is the procedure for giving feedback or raising complaints?
- Are residents allowed pets and does the home have its own pets?
- Is there a residents' committee and how often does it meet?

2. Accommodation

Your room and facilities

- Can you view the room you might be offered?
- Is it possible to move rooms, should you have any concerns with the room in the future?
- Can you bring your own furniture and possessions?
- Is there a telephone in the room, or somewhere in the home to make phone calls?
- Is there an emergency call system in the room?
- How do you use the emergency call system?
- Does the room have a private or en-suite toilet and bathroom facilities?
- Are the toilet and bathroom facilities suitably adapted?
- Are the rooms and corridors wide enough for a walking frame or wheelchair?
- Can residents go to their room whenever they want?
- Is there somewhere safe and secure to keep valuables?

Meals

- Who provides the food?
- Can you see a menu or try a meal?
- What are the mealtimes?
- Are mealtimes flexible?
- Where will meals be served?
- Are residents allowed to eat in their room?

Leisure time

- Is there a communal lounge?
- Does it have a TV?
- Is there a quiet area?
- Is there a garden/outdoor space?
- Will you have to ask to go outside?
- What social activities are on offer?
- Are there smoking and non-smoking areas?

Visitors

- How often can residents have visitors?
- Are there set visiting times?
- Can visitors stay overnight?
- Can visitors stay for meals?
- Are there any charges for visitor stays or meals?
- Is there a private room where residents can spend time with visitors?
- Are children welcome?
- Is it easy for your friends and family to reach the home by car or public transport?
- What security is in place to stop unwanted people coming in, or residents from wandering out?

3. Cost of care

Fees

- How much are the weekly fees?
- What's included?
- How are they calculated?
- How can they be paid?
- How often are fees collected?
- Are they collected on a particular date or day of the week?
- How are NHS-funded nursing care payments accounted for?
- How frequently are the fees reviewed?
- How much notice does the home give for fee increases?
- When they were last increased and by how much?
- What are the charges for any additional services?
- Is any flexibility for providing these services yourself or do you have to use the services they provide?
- Are the fees and additional service costs clearly outlined in the care home's contract?
- What happens when a resident dies while living in the care home or staying in hospital? Will fees have to be paid for a certain length of time?

Contract and deposit

- Are you tied into the contract for a minimum period?
- Is there a notice period for cancelling the contract or can it be done immediately?
- Are you required to pay an advance payment as a deposit?
- Is the deposit refundable?
- Under what circumstances the deposit might not be returned in full?
- If the contract is cancelled by either party, what happens to any deposit already paid?
- What happens if you're self-funding your care and run out of money?

Being away from, and leaving the care home

- What is the care home's policy on periods of non-occupancy?
- Is there a charge for this?
- How long is the absence period before any reduced fees apply?
- What are the reduced fees?
- How are they calculated?
- How long do they last?
- Is there a limit to how long the resident can be absent from the care home before the contract is affected?
- How much notice should be given before leaving?
- If leaving the care home, would you be entitled to a pro-rata refund of any fees already paid?
- How much notice must the care home give if they want the resident to leave?
- After a resident's death, how much time does their next of kin have to clear the room of personal possessions?