

The background of the page is a photograph of a young woman with blonde hair, wearing a white lab coat over a blue shirt, supporting an elderly woman with grey hair. The young woman is smiling and looking off to the side, with her hand resting on the elderly woman's shoulder. The elderly woman is also looking in the same direction. The image is partially obscured by a large blue diagonal shape in the bottom left corner, which contains the text.

Choosing a residential care provider

A comprehensive list of questions you may want to ask in order to help you find the right provider for you

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Introduction

When you visit a care home to assess whether it might be the right place for you or your relative, what should you be looking for? What questions should you ask about the home? How can you assess how well it might meet the needs of the person who requires care?

The following checklist is designed to help you find out what you really need to know about each of the care homes or residential care settings that you are considering, so that you can more easily compare them, knowing that you have been thorough in your search.

We aim to help you think about which things matter most to you and/ or the person who is looking for care. Some of the questions may not be relevant to your situation or may not be important to you, and can be ignored, but this list should help you to assess the homes you are visiting, and may include some questions you would not otherwise have considered. By jotting down your answers and impressions for each home, you can then compare notes after you have visited all of the homes you are considering, helping you to be clear about which ones best meet your needs.

The column on the right of the checklist is for you to use in whatever way you see fit – perhaps ticking to show that you have covered that question, putting a star against the questions that are of most importance to you, or simply recording a score out of 10 to indicate your general impression of that aspect of the provider.

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YOUR CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS

Home (name, address and contact details):

First Impressions

Are the grounds and buildings well maintained?	
Are the views in and from the home pleasant?	
Was a member of staff quick to meet and welcome you when you first arrived?	
Do the staff seem warm, friendly and polite? What impression did they make?	
Do the residents seem happy, active and sociable? Are they talking to each other?	
Is the environment homely and welcoming?	
Is it fresh, clean and comfortably furnished?	
Is the manager approachable?	

Notes/comments

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Location

Is the home in the locality or community that the person needing care has been used to?	
Is the home easy to get to for relatives and friends?	
Are there good public transport links nearby?	
Is parking available? Is it affordable or free?	
Are local amenities such as shops, churches or pubs nearby?	
Are there pleasant parks or gardens around the home or nearby?	
Is it a noisy or quiet area? Which of these would be preferable?	
Are there interesting things to see or do outside?	

What are the views like from different rooms?	
Does the home have its own transport available to use with/ for the residents?	
Notes/comments about location	
Accessibility	
Are there sufficient disabled parking spaces?	
Is there good wheelchair access into the home and throughout?	
Are doorways throughout the home wide enough for wheelchair and/or electric buggy access?	
Notes/comments	
Accommodation	
Is the accommodation well decorated, bright and cheery?	
Are the rooms a comfortable temperature?	
Can you decorate and re-arrange the room to suit yourself?	
To what extent can residents bring their own belongings including furniture?	
Can residents bring their own pets?	
If a pet dies, are residents allowed to replace them?	
Does the home smell fresh and airy?	
Does it feel safe and secure or can people just wander into the home?	
Are there handrails in hallways and corridors to help less mobile residents get around safely (remember someone who is mobile now may not be in the months or years ahead)?	
Do residents have a choice between sharing with other residents or having their own private room and washing facilities?	
Are there both showers and baths available? Is one of these options preferable?	
Are bathrooms adapted to help people in and out of the bath or shower?	

If there are shared bathrooms, is this organised to your satisfaction?	
Are bathrooms located conveniently for the rooms?	
Is the system for calling for staff assistance flexible and accessible?	
Are residents free to adjust the heating or open the windows in their own room?	
How often are rooms cleaned?	
Are there plenty of sockets in the room including telephone and television sockets?	
Are there communal lounge areas? Are there areas both with and without televisions?	
Are there toilet facilities within easy reach of the communal rooms?	
Is there a separate dining room?	
Is there a bar?	
Can you lock your room and is there a secure place for storing valuables?	
Does the room have its own small fridge?	

Notes/comments about accommodation:

Facilities

Are there facilities for people with hearing/visual difficulties?	
Does the home have the right adaptations and equipment to meet your needs?	
Are all areas accessible for wheelchair users?	
Does the home have extra wheelchairs and walking aids available?	
Is there useful equipment such as lifts and specially equipped bathrooms?	
Are the arrangements for laundry and room cleaning satisfactory?	
Is sufficient medical help available in a timely fashion?	
Can residents have their own GP?	
Are there a variety of services available – for example do chiropodists/ physiotherapists/ hairdressers/ dentists/ opticians and beauty therapists visit regularly?	
Are residents accompanied on visits to the GP or hospital?	

Notes/comments about facilities:

Activities

Are there lounges or social areas with furniture arranged to allow small groups to socialise?	
Can residents continue to pursue their hobbies and interests?	
Are there organised activities and entertainment? Do the types of activities available suit you?	
Are there dedicated activities staff at the home? Is there a coordinator?	
Do residents have a say in what activities are organised?	
Are outings and holidays arranged? How much do they generally cost?	
Are escorts available if necessary?	
Is a library service available?	
Do staff read to residents with sight impairment, and/or are there facilities for listening to audio books?	
Are there facilities for residents to use the internet – how is this organized?	
Can residents take responsibility for their own flower bed or help in the garden in other ways?	

Notes/comments about activities:

Catering	
Can you join residents for a meal as part of your visit, to see what the food is really like?	
How much choice is available? How frequently does the menu change? Can you see a sample menu?	
Are special diets catered for?	
Is the choice of food interesting, varied and good quality?	
Are residents able to influence/ suggest what meals are available?	
Can residents take meals in their own room if they want to?	
Can residents eat with guests if they wish?	
Are snacks and drinks available at any time of the day or night? If so, what choices are available and how accessible are they?	
Is alcohol available if residents would like it?	
Notes/comments about catering:	
Day to day living	
Are any of the existing residents already known to the person who needs care? If so do they have a positive relationship?	
Do residents look happy and well cared for?	
Do they talk to each other? Are they animated and sociable?	
Does the home use signs or pictures to help residents know where things are?	
Are residents involved in decisions about their life in the home?	
Can residents have their own telephone in their room with a direct dial number? If not, can they have and use a mobile phone? Is there good reception inside the home?	
Can residents use a telephone in private and in comfort?	
Does each resident have their own personal care plan?	
Are there any rules and restrictions e.g. going out, time to return etc? If so are you happy with the restrictions/ freedoms in place?	
Are there set times for, getting up, going to bed, or having a bath, or can residents choose when to do these things?	
Are there designated smoking as well as non-smoking areas in the grounds if this is relevant to you?	

Is there somewhere that residents can choose privacy and peace and quiet, other than just in their own bedroom?	
Can residents help prepare meals, or have the facility to safely prepare their own meals?	
Can residents do their own laundry if they want to?	
Can residents help clean their own rooms if they want to?	
Would you have to share a bathroom or bedroom?	
Can residents choose whether to have a bath or shower and how often?	
Can residents choose their routine, such as when they get up and go to bed?	
Can residents choose what they wear?	
How do staff help to ensure that clothes don't get mixed up between residents?	
Can religious practices be catered for e.g. help to attend church services, proper observation of kosher principles etc?	
Can residents handle their own money? If not, what arrangements are in place?	
What facilities are available for computer access? Is there a communal computer? Is wifi available in communal areas? In bedrooms?	
What exercise and keep fit activities and facilities are there?	

Notes/comments:

Nature of care provided

Does the home offer the level of care you need? Are there residents who seem to have a similar level of need to you?	
Ask the home for an up-to-date copy of the care plan so you can understand exactly what care and support are included for the current fee you have been quoted - this will be useful in the future, for example, if the home wants to increase the fee (if care needs increase) and also to help prepare for an assessment for (free) NHS Continuing Healthcare funding (if relevant).	
Ask the home to provide you with a written contract of the care they will provide for the fees charged - whilst this isn't essential, it can be very useful to have this to give you peace of mind about the service you are paying for. You can also use this to refer back to in the future to demonstrate changes in care needs which can be very helpful information to influence eligibility decisions in respect of NHS Continuing Healthcare funding (NHS CHC).	

Can you/have you seen the most recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection Report for the home?	
Ask for a copy of the care home's 'Code of conduct'.	
Is an increased level of care, or nursing care, available should you need it in the future (so that you don't have to move to a different home if your needs change)?	
If it's a nursing home, how many of the staff are trained and to what level?	
How does the home let family or friends know if a resident is taken ill?	
Does the home link with a specific GP practice for residents?	
Do staff receive specific training in oral health and are they aware of the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) oral health guidelines? How does the care home ensure its residents oral health?	
Does the care home have a dentist who is able and willing to visit care homes to treat people who may be less mobile?	
If you have a particular condition, does the home have the right experience and staff to deliver the right care appropriately?	
Do health staff such as opticians and chiropodists visit regularly?	
Who decides when a health check-up is needed?	
Are there travel arrangements for regular hospital and clinic visits and do staff accompany residents, and is there a charge for this?	
Do all residents have up to date care plans in place, including care at the end of life if appropriate?	
How does the home support those with sensory impairments or dementia?	
Have any previous residents have needed to move to a new home on the basis that the home is unable to provide the care they need. In other words, are you comfortable with the home's contract termination policy?	
What palliative care services are available (or would a resident have to move to a different home if they required end of life care?)	
What education, training and support do staff receive in respect of end-of-life care?	
Is the home involved in any of the national initiatives to improve the experience of dying in a care home? For example, the Gold Standard Framework http://www.goldstandardsframework.org.uk/	
Notes/comments about the care provided:	

Fees	
How much are the fees and are they paid in advance?	
Are there any up-front fees charged, for example towards the upkeep of specific facilities and communal areas? If so, are they proportionate to the time likely to be spent in the care home?	
Is a deposit required? Is this deposit returnable? What is it for?	
Is there a standing order or direct debit facility to avoid any delayed payments?	
Is it clear exactly what is included in the weekly/ monthly charges?	
Are fees altered or reviewed annually?	
Ask for information about the care home's cost increases over the past few years - this will give you an indication of potential cost increases in the future.	
Are fees altered or reviewed according to increasing needs?	
How much notice will the home give if it is going to raise the fees?	
What services are charged for as 'extras'? How much do they cost?	
Are the fees affordable on a long- term basis?	
Will you have to make up the difference after any state contribution?	
Will the home continue to accommodate you on state support if your income/assets fall below the means tested threshold?	
Will the home provide a written contract of the care they will provide for the fees charged?	
If you're considering purchasing care insurance (an immediate or deferred needs annuity), ask the care home if they will consider agreeing to maximum fee increases (e.g. of no more than 5% over 5 years) on the basis that you run no risk of running out of money and thus, can continue paying the care home fees for as long as needed.	
Does the home require any fees to continue after a resident has died?	
Notes/comments about fees:	

Contract Terms	
Can you retain your own room if you will be away for a period of time, either on holiday or due to a period in hospital?	
Can you have a short-stay or trial period before committing longer term to moving in?	
What happens if you are unhappy with the home after having moved in?	
Will you be given a statement of terms before/on admission?	
Who is required to sign the contract? If relatives are asked to sign the contract, they should seek legal advice before doing so.	
Are all procedures, such as complaints, clearly spelt out? Are you happy with these procedures?	
Is the notice to terminate the contract reasonable?	
Are any fees payable when a resident dies? In this situation how soon must personal belongings be removed?	
How much notice are you entitled to if you are asked to leave or if the home needs to close?	
How is the NHS contribution towards registered nursing costs accounted for in a nursing home contract? In other words if a resident becomes eligible for weekly Funded Nursing Care (FNC) payments following an assessment (currently £267.68 p/week) will this contribution from the NHS be deducted from your weekly fee stated in the contract, or will your weekly fee increase to absorb the NHS payment (and thus make no impact on your own contribution)?	
Are valuables covered by the care home's insurance?	
Notes/comments:	
Feedback and complaints	
Are you encouraged to give feedback - both positive and negative?	
What complaints have there been in the last 12 months?	
Is the complaints procedure readily available?	
Are family members encouraged to be involved in the life of the home?	
Is the manager accessible and approachable if you should have any concerns?	

Notes/comments:	
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Staff

Do the staff seem warm, friendly, caring and interested?	
What kind of initial and on-going training do staff receive, and from whom?	
Are there adequate numbers of staff on duty both during the day and overnight?	
Do the staff appear clean, cheerful and respectful?	
Do the staff talk to and engage with residents? How do they talk to them? What kind of attitude do they generally show towards residents?	
What different languages do the staff speak?	
Can residents choose if they have a male or female carer?	
Are all staff trained in caring for residents with dementia?	
Do the staff have care qualifications?	
What is staff turnover like? (If high, this could be a sign of low staff morale, or dissatisfaction with how the home is run)	

General notes/comments about staff

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Visitors

Are visitors always welcome? Or are there set visiting hours? Are you happy with visitor access?	
Are there places that residents can spend time with their visitors comfortably in private?	
Are there any facilities for visitors to stay overnight or longer?	
Are there restrictions on the number of visitors at one time, or can whole families come to visit together?	
Are young children welcome?	
Are visitors able to visit during mealtimes and can they have meals with residents (if so, is this charged for, and how much)?	

Notes/comments about visitors and visiting arrangements

Gardens

Is there a garden?

Can residents use the garden? Is access restricted?

Are the grounds/gardens attractive?

Are all areas safe and accessible?

Are there quiet places to sit?

Notes/comments about gardens/ grounds

Safety and security

What security arrangements are in place to make sure residents are safe?

Can staff explain the procedures if there are serious incidents, complaints or safeguarding concerns raised?

Is there a resident's call-bell system?

Is there secure storage in the bedrooms?

Are there secure arrangements for handling personal money?

Does the home have an up-to-date comprehensive fire risk assessment?

What evidence can be seen that the fire risk assessment was carried out by an assessor that is competent and experienced in fire safety complexities?
(Competency can be demonstrated by a Professional Body Registration scheme or affiliation to a Certification Body that is UKAS accredited for the activity)

What emergency plans exist in the event of a fire and what training have staff had to implement such plans?

Notes/comments about safety/security

Covid-19

Does the home have any confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the home at the point of admission?

What is the process for isolating known Covid-19 cases within the home and shielding other residents?

What is the home's policy for visiting?

What is the home's policy for admitting new residents?

How often are you testing staff and residents?

What is the coronavirus and flu vaccination rate amongst staff?

What Infection Control Measures do you have in place?

- Are you using air filtration and/or air purification devices within the care setting?
- What measures does the home have in place to identify and trace contact between people in the care setting?
- How, how often and to what extent are staff trained to use measures which prevent and control infections?
- Has the home been independently assessed in respect of their approach to infection control?
- Has the home been assessed by the care regulator in respect of its approach to infection control and what was the outcome?
- Is the home using sterilisation and/or disinfection devices within the care setting?

Is the home participating and supporting the S.A.F.E initiative (Symptom Assessment for Everyone)

www.autumna.co.uk/home-search/safe-care-providers/

Notes/comments about Covid 19 and infection control

