

Moving into an Assisted Living Community

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Moving is stressful for anyone and can be particularly stressful for older adults who have lived in their homes for decades. Moving into an assisted living community can be a confusing endeavor without some basic information on the nature of assisted living, what to look for in communities, and how to find the right match for yourself or your loved one.

What exactly is "assisted living"? Assisted living is a congregate residential community that provides personal care services and oversight 24 hours a day in a home-like environment that maximizes independence, autonomy, privacy, and safety.

How to know when it's time to consider an assisted living community

Let's face it. The initial reaction most older adults have to the prospect of moving into an assisted living community is some version of "no." However, ask yourself, your spouse, or your loved one the following questions.

- Do you feel isolated or lonely?
- Do you have trouble managing your medications?
- Do you have trouble moving through your home safely?
- Do you have trouble preparing 3 meals a day, doing laundry, or cleaning?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," it may be time to consider moving into an assisted living community.

Evaluating assisted living communities

All assisted living communities provide assistance with activities of daily living or "ADLs." ADLs include bathing, toileting, dressing, and grooming. These communities also provide assistance with medications and escort service to activities and meals. All assisted living communities provide activity programming and opportunities to engage with other residents on a daily basis. Some assisted living communities provide memory support services for individuals with memory loss.

How do you determine which community is right for you or your loved one? To select an appropriate assisted living community you need to match your care needs with the services provided by the facility. What activities do you need help with and how much help do you need? Does the assisted living community provide the services you need? The closer the match the better the fit between you and the community.

Here are some things to consider when selecting an assisted living community.

- Observe the upkeep and safety of the facility. Does it appear clean? Are there hand rails in bathing areas and hallways? Is the lighting adequate?
- Are the grounds and the building well maintained?
- Evaluate the aesthetics of the apartment - does it suit the older adult's needs?
- Verify the type of training given to staff. Compare staff numbers with other assisted living facilities you are considering, looking at the number of staff on each shift for the weekend and weekdays.
- Look at the menus. Is the community able to accommodate special dietary needs? Does the community have set meal times (e.g., breakfast is at 8am) or a period of meal service (e.g. breakfast is served from 7am to 10am). Is seating in the dining room assigned or open?
- Look at the range and frequency of activities. Are there off-site activities such as lunches and trips to the zoo or art galleries? Does the facility offer on-site activities such as religious services, lectures, discussion groups, exercise classes?

- Inquire about transportation services available because residents will have to see their doctors off-site.
- What access do residents have to licensed health care staff such as nurses? What fitness equipment and fitness staff does the facility have?
- What social services does the facility have? Is there a social worker available to residents?
- Ask how new residents are integrated into the community. Does the facility have a newcomers support group or a “resident friend” program?

Finally, go visit the facilities. Attend an activity. Have a meal. Talk with other residents and staff. Get a feel for the community and observe how you are treated. Ask yourself two questions:

“Does this community provide the services I need to succeed?”

“Could I make this place home?”

If the answers are “yes,” you have most likely found a good fit.

For more information on moving into an assisted living community visit The Center for Excellence in Assisted Living website: <http://www.theceal.org/>.