



# Nursing home checklist

Choosing a nursing home for a family member can be one of the most difficult decisions you make. The Registry of U.S. Nursing Homes ([memberofthefamily.net/usregistry.htm](http://memberofthefamily.net/usregistry.htm)) lists 16,000 homes alphabetically by state, with results of the past three government surveys for each home. Once you've narrowed down your candidate list, make several copies of the following checklist and fill in one for each nursing home you are considering.

Nursing home: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

### Credentials and overall environment

Is the facility certified by Medicare and Medicaid?  Yes  No

How long has the facility been certified? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the facility had stable ownership for some time, with the same administrator and director?  Yes  No

Is a statement of residents' rights clearly posted?  Yes  No

Does the facility have an Alzheimer's unit or other special-care area restricted to residents with special-care needs?  Yes  No

Is this specialty unit separated from other areas of the facility?  Yes  No

Is the facility well lit, clean, safe, and welcoming?  Yes  No

### Location and visiting

Frequent visits generally will improve the resident's mental and emotional well-being and ensure that quality-of-care issues can be addressed as they arise.

Is the facility convenient to the resident's family members and friends?  Yes  No

What are the visiting hours? \_\_\_\_\_

Are family visits welcomed?  Yes  No

Are there restrictions on visits by children?  Yes  No

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- Are family members allowed to take residents out for a day or overnight?  Yes  No

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- Are there areas where family and friends can visit privately?  Yes  No

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- Is the facility close to the office of the resident's doctor?  Yes  No

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- Is the facility convenient to public transportation?  Yes  No

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**Mental and emotional well-being**

- Are mental health services available?  Yes  No

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- Are activities planned each day for the residents?  Yes  No

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- Are events regularly scheduled? (Ask to look at the schedule.)  Yes  No

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- Are there activities for residents who can't leave their beds?  Yes  No

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- Is there a library available for residents, with large-print and audio books?  Yes  No

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- Is there a small store for purchasing personal items, such as shaving cream, hair care products, and snacks?  Yes  No

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- Are residents able to enjoy outdoor areas, such as an enclosed garden?  Yes  No

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- Are plants, pets, and other natural elements added to the residents' environment?  Yes  No

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- Are residents taken to special community events and cultural activities?  Yes  No

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**Rooms**

- Will the resident share a room and/or a bathroom with one or more other residents?  Yes  No

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- How are roommates and rooms selected?

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- If the resident is dissatisfied, can roommates be changed?  Yes  No

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- How is this accomplished?

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- Can the resident bring some of his or her own furniture and decorations?  Yes  No

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- Is drinking water readily available?  Yes  No

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- Are nurse and emergency call buttons within easy reach of bed, toilet, and bath?  Yes  No

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**The resident's care plan**

Individual care plans must be implemented for each resident.

How often is the care plan reviewed and changed?

What is the protocol for handling problems?

Are there regular fire drills?  Yes  No

What bathing facilities are available, and how is bathing handled when the person needs assistance?

**Nursing home employees**

How are employees selected?

Are employees screened for drug use, criminal records, or other potential problems?  Yes  No

What is the turnover rate for skilled employees?

What is the turnover rate for employees who perform ancillary services, such as meal preparation and financial recordkeeping?

Are registered nurses or licensed practical nurses on duty at all times?  Yes  No

Is a trained social worker on staff?  Yes  No

What is the ratio of staff to residents during each shift?  
(Ideally, a facility will have one nurse's aide for every five or six residents between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m.)

Does the staff treat residents with respect?  Yes  No

Can you talk privately to residents to ask what they think of the facility?  Yes  No

Are staff members available to talk if you have a question about a loved one's care?  Yes  No

**Medical care**

Is there is a physician used by the majority of residents?  Yes  No

What are his/her qualifications?

How often is the doctor on the premises?

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Does the doctor have a good bedside manner with residents?  Yes  No

May residents use their personal physician if they choose?  Yes  No

Are there arrangements with a nearby hospital in the event of a medical emergency?  Yes  No

What diagnostic treatment facilities are available at the facility?

### Meals

Eating is both a necessity and a pleasure that continues even when we're unable to enjoy much else.

Are meals served in a communal dining room or is each resident brought meals in his or her room?

If communal, how are tables assigned in the dining room?

How long does it take for a meal to be delivered to a bedridden resident?

How does the food taste, and how is it presented to the resident?

Is there a way to heat food that has become cold?  Yes  No

Can you stay for a meal? (This will help you gauge the quality of the food service.)  Yes  No

### Admission requirements

What financial information will the facility require during the admissions process?

Can the resident or his representative have copies in advance of all admissions documents and contracts for review?  Yes  No

How long does the admissions process take?

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**Cost of care**

What is included in the cost of care?

How are extra items billed?

Can laundry be taken off premises?

Yes  No

Does this save the resident some costs?

Yes  No

How are prescription drugs handled?

What is the cost difference between a private room and a semiprivate room?

**Transportation services**

If required nonemergency medical services are not available on premises (such as dialysis), how is transportation arranged?

What about transportation to other places, such as local stores and religious services?

**Resources**

CareScout [carescout.com](http://carescout.com)

An unbiased source for ratings and reviews of eldercare providers nationwide. Detailed, 7-to 10-page nursing home reports are available for a small fee and include information on quality, resident population profiles, and health violations.

ElderLawAnswers [elderlawanswers.com](http://elderlawanswers.com)

Offers tips on choosing a facility, talking with family about placement, residents' rights, and resolving disputes. Also lists qualified elder law attorneys nationwide.

Nursing Home INFO [nursinghomeinfo.com](http://nursinghomeinfo.com)

Offers a facility search function, a needs assessment survey to help you determine the type of facility you should be looking for, and explains what a nursing home is and what types of services are provided.

Silin, Peter S., *Nursing Homes: The Family's Journey*. (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001)

Burger, Sarah, Editor, *Nursing Homes: Getting Good Care There*. (Impact Publishers, 2001)

Rantz, Marilyn, et al. *The New Nursing Homes: A 20-Minute Way to Find Great Long-Term Care*. (Fairview Press, 2001)

Charlap, Steven S., M.D., *Making Sense of Nursing Homes: A Guide for Families*. (Age Sense, 2002)

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