



Choosing the Right Care Home

A Practical Guide

You've compiled your shortlist of suitable homes, what next?

Use this free download to guide you through the next steps, helping you plan your visits with confidence.

Compiled by a registered nurse and ex nursing home manager with over 24 years of experience caring for older people, this guide includes key questions to ask, important factors to consider, and practical tips to ensure you gather all the information needed to make the best choice for your loved one.

Visiting Care Homes

You've got your shortlist of potentially suitable homes. The next step is to choose the homes that look most suitable (and appealing!) and plan your visit.

You may choose to turn up unannounced, as this means you will be seeing the home in its everyday state, giving you a better feel for the quality of care and its environment.

However, the downside of this approach is that the Home Manager may not be there, and staff may be busy caring for the residents, making a lengthy tour of the home difficult.

If you decide to make an appointment, you should ask for a viewing of the home or see if you can book in for lunch—this is a great way of meeting the people that already live there and absorbing the true atmosphere.

Many homes have open events, such as coffee mornings and open days, which you can attend and chat to residents and visitors.

Before you go, consider the information you need to gather during your visit.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. In fact, take a checklist of things you want to find out, so you get the same information from each of the homes you visit.



Key Questions to Ask When Visiting a Care Home

What's included in the fees and what are 'extras'?

Many care homes charge for "extras" such as trips, toiletries, chiropody and hairdressing. It's important to know exactly what you'll be charged for.

What activities are on offer? It is a regulatory requirement for care homes to provide activities for residents. Ensure your chosen home offers a range of meaningful activities that stimulate and engage residents. Many homes have activity coordinators to ensure residents are enjoying themselves. Check whether there is a minibus for outings- if not, how do they get out and about?

Can they escort your loved one to medical appointments? If your loved one has a hospital appointment or similar, can a member of staff escort them? Are there extra charges for this?

How often do residents go outside and exercise?

Fresh air and day trips can significantly improve a resident's wellbeing.

Will there be TV and internet? Some homes only offer wireless internet access in communal areas, so check the policy. If TV is important to your loved one, check which channels are included.

When can I visit? Most good care homes should allow visits at any time, within reason. Some may have fixed visiting hours, so it's important to check.

Can we bring our pets? Pets can be a lifeline for many older people, so check the home's policy. Consider what will happen if the pet needs vet attention.

What's the ratio of staff to residents? Find out the staffing levels for both day and night shifts. If staff are rushing from bed to bed, it may indicate inadequate care.

There is no ratio, or any kind of specific 'care staff per resident' requirement. The only requirement is that the number of staff has to be enough to make sure that the CQC's basic requirements in other areas are met. However asking how many nurses and care staff are on duty at any given time in relation to the number of residents will give you something to compare between homes.

Bear in mind that this is not an exact science because different residents will require varying levels of assistance. You can read the CQC regulations on staffing, here.

[Health and Social Care Act 2008 \(Regulated Activities\) Regulations 2014: Regulation 18](#)



Key Questions to Ask When Visiting a Care Home

What is the food like? A varied, nutritious diet is crucial for older people's health. Check how often the menu changes. If you have any particular dietary needs, make sure the home can cater for them. There should be choice at every meal.

What happens if my relative passes away? Check what you will be charged for in this situation. Some homes charge until you remove all personal effects from the room.

What is the notice period? If your loved one is unhappy, you may need to move them. Ensure you understand the notice period and any associated costs. Sometimes personal circumstances will force a change of home. For example, a resident may develop dementia while in a home that isn't equipped to provide that type of care. It's important to understand the process for such situations, and preferable avoid them altogether with good forward planning.

What happens if we run out of money? It is important to understand the homes policy for when funds run out. It is advisable to get financial advice from a financial advisor who specialises in later life planning. We can signpost you to a specialist advisor- just ask.

What is the usual annual fee uplift? Most care homes and nursing homes will increase their fees by a percentage each year. It is useful to have some idea of what this is likely to be to allow you to plan for the future.

Do they provide furniture, or do you bring your own? Ask to view an empty room, Ideally the one which will be available to your loved one. Most care homes offer furnished rooms, but you may wish to bring pieces of your own furniture.

What kind of buzzer system does the home have? Some homes have systems that sound throughout the whole home when someone presses buzzer, much like a traditional hospital ward. Other homes have staff pagers, which can be less disruptive if your loved one is sensitive to noise.

Will my loved one have a private bathroom?

Newer, purpose built homes usually have ensuite rooms. Older buildings which have been converted may have shared bathrooms.

Does the home implement the GSF training programme to help their staff deliver the best end of life care? This programme is recommended by the CQC to help staff deliver the best care for residents nearing the end of their life.

You can find more information here [Gold Standard Framework - Care Homes Training Programme](#)



Key Questions to Ask When Visiting a Care Home

First Impressions

- Visit multiple homes before making a final choice and spend enough time in each to get a good feel.
- Check the most recent CQC inspection report to understand how the home operates.
- If possible, visit with the person who will be receiving care to gauge their reaction.

Things to Observe

- Are you greeted in a friendly manner?
- Is the home clean and well-decorated?
- Are there any unpleasant smells?
- Do residents appear happy, well dressed, and engaged in activities?
- Is the home easily accessible, with public transport links and nearby amenities?

Facilities and Living Conditions

- Are residents encouraged to bring their own possessions?
- Are bedrooms well decorated, bright, and welcoming?
- Can residents have privacy when they need it?
- Do staff knock before entering rooms?
- Are there enough accessible toilets?

Activities and Social Engagement

- Are chairs arranged to encourage conversation rather than placed in a circle?
- What is the view from the windows, is it pleasant?
- Is there more than one sitting area?
- Is there a garden where residents can walk safely?

Everyday Life and Community Involvement

- Is communication between the home and relatives encouraged?
- Can visitors join residents for meals or take them out?
- Are trips, outings, and special events organised?
- Are residents encouraged to take exercise and participate in social activities?

Staff and Management

- Do staff interact with residents in a friendly and caring way?
- Are they trained in dementia care?
- Do they know about residents' backgrounds, habits, and interests?
- Does the manager communicate openly and answer questions thoroughly?



Key Considerations When Visiting a Care Home

Medical Care

- What happens if a resident is unwell or needs medication?
- Can residents keep their own GP surgery?
- Can a relative stay overnight if necessary?
- If a resident's condition deteriorates, can they remain in the home?
- If not, what are the alternative arrangements?

Considering a Trial Stay

If your loved one is unsure about moving into a care home, a trial stay may be an option.

This could also be arranged as a short term respite stay, giving them a chance to experience the home before making a permanent move.

Planning the Move

Key points to consider include:

- Liaise with the home regarding a formal assessment of needs.
- Check the care plan—what is included and how will you be notified of changes?
- Obtain a copy of the home's contract and seek legal advice before signing.
- Be clear about fees, what is considered an 'extra', and how much notice is given for fee increases.
- Agree on the move-in date and ensure the home has all necessary arrangements in place.
- Help your loved one choose personal belongings to take with them.
- Make a checklist of what needs to be done on the day of the move.

Final Thoughts

While there is a lot to consider, with careful planning, the process of choosing and moving into a care home can be made much easier. I really hope this guide has been useful to you, and if you need more help, please get in touch using the details below.



Brookes Care Solutions Ltd. was founded by Jodie Brookes to help families find the best available care for older people.

Jodie is a registered nurse who has spent:



- 7 years managing nursing homes
- 12 years working in community palliative care
- 13 years working as a care expert witness- advising the UK courts on care of cancer patients and older people

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