

Finding the Right Assisted Living Facility



Selecting an assisted living facility for yourself or a loved one is an important decision. While it is rare to find a facility that specifically caters to people with Parkinson's disease (PD), there are many questions you can ask and things to look for to help you carefully weigh your options in order to find the best fit possible.

Assisted living facilities provide help with day-to-day activities while striving to promote independence and provide opportunities to socialize with peers.

Is Assisted Living Right for You or Your Loved One?

Although you may find some exceptions, assisted living facilities normally offer these services:

- Assistance with daily living activities (getting in and out of bed, bathing, getting dressed, grooming, etc.)
- Housekeeping and laundry
- Daily meals in a group dining setting
- Medication reminders or administration
- Bathroom assistance
- Health and exercise programs
- Social and recreational activities

Note: Medicare does not pay for room and board and personal care costs at assisted living facilities. In most states, Medicaid does not pay for these costs either. This means that most people need to use their personal income, assets and savings, Veterans benefits or long-term care insurance for an assisted living.

Reasons To Consider Assisted Living

- Person with Parkinson's prefers to live in assisted living.
- Primary care partner is unable to provide necessary care due to employment conflicts.
- Skilled nursing (which provides access to 24-hour care from nurses and certified nursing assistants) is not necessary at this time.
- Household environment is not suitable (space, physical layout, young children).

Finding An Assisted Living Facility

If you or your loved one is considering a move to assisted living, ask your doctors about good facilities in the area. Gather recommendations

for assisted living options from friends and family, local support/exercise groups and community organizations serving people with PD. You may also consider reading the online reviews of local assisted living facilities and visiting their website.

A Paying for Senior Care article titled, "Assessing Assisted Living Quality: Consumer Reviews, Ratings & Complaints," offers useful tips for how to interpret assisted living facility reviews visit PayingForSeniorCare.com. If you are looking for assisted living facilities in your state that accept Medicaid, call your local Area Agency on Aging: ElderCare.acl.gov.

Once you have a list of assisted living facilities, plan to visit them for a tour and to gather information about their services, resources and costs. It is often helpful to take a family member, friend or Aging Life Care Expert with you to help assess the services and environment. Find an Aging Life Care Expert in your area at AgingLifeCare.org.

The Benefits of Planning Ahead

Even if you are only considering assisted living and do not expect to move in soon, it is a good idea to visit a few facilities before a sudden change in care requirements necessitates a move. Starting early will allow you time to get to know the assisted living facilities in your area.

Questions to Ask a Potential Assisted Living Facility

Refer to the questions on the following pages for guidance. Try to make a second, unannounced visit in the evening or on a weekend. You may learn additional information that adds to your overall opinion of the facility.

First Glance Considerations:

- Is the environment in good repair, clean and free of odors?
- Does the staff seem friendly and approachable?
- Can residents access outdoor spaces? Are the outdoor spaces well-maintained?

Notes:

Care Questions:

- What is the medication schedule? How can I be sure my loved one receives their Parkinson's medications on time, every time?
- What is the staff-to-resident ratio? Does this change during the overnight hours?
- Are there on-site rehabilitation services (physical, occupational and speech therapies) and counseling services? If not, does the facility contract with an outside provider or can I hire one?
- In the event of a medical emergency, can my loved one be taken to our preferred hospital?
- What kind of Parkinson's training does staff receive?
- How does the staff determine a care plan?

Notes:

Social & Wellness Opportunities:

- What spiritual and/or religious services are offered to residents?
- In what ways are residents' lives enriched (music therapy, art therapy, animal therapy, etc.)? Can I see an activities calendar?
- What programs provide cognitive stimulation?
- What types of fitness classes and fitness equipment are available?

Notes:

Dining Questions:

- Can you see a food menu? See the Nutrition fact sheet for more information on nutritional needs of people with Parkinson's at Parkinson.org/Library.
- Are there snacks available and are they easily accessible?
- How does the staff accommodate special dining needs (diet, eating assistance and adaptive devices)?
- If you are unable to eat in the dining room, is there a charge for in-room meal service?

Notes:

Financial Questions:

- What are the monthly charges? Can I receive an itemized bill each month?
- Can additional services be added to your monthly bill without my permission?
- How often are grooming/salon services available on-site? What is the cost for a haircut, style, manicure, etc.?

Notes:

When you have found the assisted living facility of your choice, you will usually be asked to put down a deposit to hold the apartment. A member of their staff will complete a screening with you or your loved one to confirm that your needs are within their scope of care. The information from this screening, together with the paperwork provided by your or your loved one's physicians, will be used to create a care plan. The monthly assisted living cost will be determined from this care plan and may or may not increase as the level of care needed increases or as rates change year to year.

For more information or access to local services, call the Parkinson's Foundation Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).

Considerations if Your Loved One Has Dementia

If your loved one needs more care due to dementia, you may need to look for a memory care environment.

Some skilled nursing facilities will have a dedicated "memory care" section with security features that keep residents with dementia from leaving without assistance. Memory care staff are often required to complete state-regulated dementia training. Many memory care wings also offer social and recreational programs designed for people in various stages of dementia.

Skilled nursing facilities serve residents with dementia in both the general and memory care wings, but the goal is to look for the setting that will best support your loved one. If feasible, visit various types of facilities nearby. While touring a non-memory care specific part of the building, try to gauge whether your loved one will receive the necessary support. For safety or interpersonal reasons, they may be supported more adequately in a memory care setting.

Memory Care Questions:

- What dementia training does the staff receive? How are they coached to communicate effectively and support the behavioral symptoms of dementia? How is staff required to keep their training current?
- How are the social and recreational programs adapted for people in various stages of dementia? What recreational programs can staff recommend for my loved one?
- How is the building or layout of the memory care community tailored to be supportive to people with dementia? How is exiting the building without staff or family assistance prevented?
- How does staff learn about residents' likes, dislikes, and interests? How is this information utilized to inform the care plan?

Notes:

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