

Choosing a care home

Use this checklist when you're viewing a care home for the first time. The more information you have, the more confident you'll feel about making the right choice.

Name of care home _____

Date _____

Contact information _____

TIPS FOR VIEWING A CARE HOME

- Make a shortlist in advance of the key questions you'd like answered as a priority.
- Try to visit with a family member or friend: one of you can focus on talking to staff/having the official tour, and the other can have a look around the place and talk to residents.
- Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions: the more information you have, the more confident you'll feel about making the right choice.
- Make a list of any follow-up questions you'd like to ask later on. It's helpful to discuss this sort of thing with someone else after the visit.
- It can be useful to make a second unannounced visit, ideally at a different time of day.
- Pay attention to what you see, hear and smell during your visit, and how the experience makes you feel. This is just as important as what you're told by the home's staff.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

- Are the buildings and the grounds well maintained?
- Is there a friendly and welcoming environment for residents and guests?
- Are individual rooms and the home in general clean and comfortable?
- Is the temperature comfortable throughout the building?
- Are there any unpleasant smells?
- Is there plenty of activity and conversation among staff and residents?
- Is there an adequate number of staff on duty?

LOCATION

- Is it easy to reach the home by car or public transport?
- Are there adequate and accessible parking spaces?
- What's the surrounding area like?
- Are there useful facilities nearby, such as shops, parks and places of worship?

THE ROOM

- Can you view the room you might be offered?
- Does the room have a nice view?
- Would you have to share a bathroom or bedroom at any time?
- Can you bring your own furniture and possessions?
- Is there adequate storage space for clothing and other belongings?
- Is the room suitably adapted, including the bathroom? Are there grab rails, for example, if needed?
- Is there an emergency call system in the room?
- Is there wi-fi in the room and in public spaces around the home?
- Is the room equipped with power sockets, a TV or a telephone?
- Is there somewhere secure to keep money and valuables?
- Can residents lock their own rooms?

COMMUNAL AREAS AND FACILITIES

- Are rooms, corridors and other spaces accessible for someone using a walking frame or wheelchair?
- Is the home well laid out? Is it easy to find your way around?
- Is there a garden or other accessible outdoor space for residents and guests to use?
- Is there a communal lounge?
- Is there a quiet area where residents can relax, without music or TV?
- Is there a café or similar place where residents can meet with guests?
- Are residents allowed their own pets, or can pets be brought to visit?

CARE AND SUPPORT

- How will the home assess your care needs?
- Is the home equipped to meet your specific care needs 24 hours a day?
- If your condition should worsen, is the home equipped to cater for your changing needs?
- Are residents and their families involved in decisions about their care?
- Can the home provide in-house nursing care if required?
- What other specialised support is available, if any – dementia care, for example?
- Is there a nearby GP practice that's responsible for residents' health care needs?
- What other healthcare services can be arranged – optician, dentist, physio or chiroprapist, for example?
- What procedures are in place to keep residents safe and secure?
- What technology is available to keep residents safe, such as alarms and monitors?
- Is there support available for end of life (palliative) care?

DAY-TO-DAY LIVING

- Can residents go to their room if they want to be alone?
- Will staff knock before entering a resident's room?
- Does the home encourage family members and friends to be actively involved in their loved one's life – for example, doing their hair or taking them out to a café?

CARE SERVICES DIRECTORY

Enter your postcode to search for care homes and other care services in your area. Use the shortlist feature to compare all your options in one place, or come back and view them later on. [which.co.uk/find-care](https://www.which.co.uk/find-care)

- How flexible is the daily routine? Can residents choose the times they prefer to get up or go to bed? Are mealtimes flexible?
- Who provides the food? Can you see a menu or even sample a meal?
- Does the home cater for your dietary preferences – for example, if you are vegan or vegetarian, or require halal or kosher options?
- How does the home support residents to practise their religious or spiritual beliefs?
- What steps does the home take to identify and respect the residents' cultural preferences?

ACTIVITIES AND SOCIAL LIFE

- Is there a regular programme of activities to keep residents active, such as music therapy, arts and crafts, exercise or gardening?
- If they're not already catered for, can the home arrange activities to suit your interests?
- Are there regular social activities for residents, such as outings or family days?
- Are residents' life stories and interests recognised and celebrated – through photos, personal effects or paintings and drawings, for example?
- Is there an additional cost for any of the activities on offer?

STAFF

- What is the ratio of care workers to residents – during the day, at night and on weekends?
- Is there a supervisor on duty at all times?
- What experience and qualifications do the manager and senior staff have?
- What training do staff members get?
- Is there a frequent turnover of staff? How many staff members have worked at the home for a long time?
- Does the home use agency staff?
- Are residents allocated a primary carer who's responsible for monitoring their care?
- Can residents choose to have male or female carers?
- If a resident is not a native English speaker, is there anyone who can speak their language?

GUESTS AND VISITING

- Are there set visiting times for guests?
- Are children welcome?
- Can guests stay overnight?
- Can guests stay for meals? Is there a charge for this?
- Are there any private rooms, other than bedrooms, where residents can meet with guests?

FEES AND CONTRACTS

- How are fees calculated? What do they include and exclude?
- When are fees collected? Are they paid in advance or in arrears?
- Are there any additional charges, such as a management fee?
- Is it necessary to make an advance payment or deposit? Is it refundable?
- If relevant, how are NHS-funded nursing care payments accounted for in the fee structure? (They should be deducted from the overall fee.)

- Are residents tied in to the contract for a minimum period?
- How much notice must be given if a resident wants to leave?
- What would happen if a resident starts off self-funding but subsequently qualifies for local authority funding? Could they continue living in the same room?

MORE QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT FEES AND CONTRACTS

Once you've found a care home you're interested in, it's important to consider some more detailed questions about the fees and contract. Find more in-depth information about what to look for in a contract at [which.co.uk/care-home-contracts](https://www.which.co.uk/care-home-contracts)

OTHER PRACTICAL ISSUES

- Is there a waiting list? When would a room be available?
- What is the procedure for giving feedback or raising complaints?
- What is the home's quality rating (from the CQC or another regional regulator) and when was their most recent inspection?
- Does the home have a food hygiene rating?
- What is covered by the home's insurance policies?
- Is there a residents' committee? How often does it meet?
- Is there a family support group or regular relatives' meetings?
- Does the home have policies in place to prevent discrimination, on the grounds of ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality or gender identity?



Which? Later Life Care

Free, independent and practical advice about caring for older people across the UK.

Information on all aspects of planning care in later life – from staying independent and organising care at home to choosing a care home and putting finances in order.

Care services directory: search across the UK for local care homes, home care agencies and support groups.

Cost of care calculator: in a few short steps, find out how much care costs where you live and whether you're eligible for financial support.

Find out more at [which.co.uk/latelife](https://www.which.co.uk/latelife)

