

Finding the perfect care home for people living with dementia

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Many people diagnosed with dementia choose to stay at home for as long as possible. As symptoms progress, though, or when people live alone, it often becomes difficult for them to be cared for at home. There are many care homes that specialise in providing safe, comfortable and caring environments for people with dementia.



Making the decision to move into a care home requires careful thought and many people find it a difficult choice to make. Whether this is about finding care yourself or for a loved one, it is important to take the time you need to make the right decision.

This guide is intended to help you to find the best dementia care home, and contains useful information about what to look for when researching and visiting care homes, and how to apply for the all-important assessment and funding.

Getting a care needs assessment

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The first thing to do is to get a care needs assessment. You may already have had one to help you manage better at home, but if things have progressed and you think you may need to move into a care home, an assessment from your local council will help you make the right decision.

The needs assessment is free, and anyone can ask for one.

For more information on getting a care needs assessment, visit:

www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services

www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/getting-a-needs-assessment

See also our leaflet at www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library



Although moving into a care home feels like a big step, and family members often feel upset or guilty that their loved one can no longer be cared for at home, it is important to remember that care homes have many advantages

Residents have access to 24/7 care from trained professionals and homes are designed to be safe, comfortable and provide all the modern facilities they need.

Many residents also enjoy an active, ready-made social life and a wide variety of activities that are specially designed to stimulate and engage people with dementia.

All Canford Healthcare homes provide sensitive, person-centred care for people with dementia, usually within specialist dementia care suites. From our many years' experience of helping people decide on the right home for their relatives, we have put together this list of the main things that people look for in their perfect dementia care home:

Location

This is all-important, especially if your relative with dementia is still active enough to get out and about. In this case, staying close to where they used to live may help them to maintain contact with friends and, where possible, continue with some favourite activities.

Generally, though, check how close the home is to family and friends, whether there are good transport links and if there are shops, cafés and other leisure facilities nearby.

Facilities

There are two main types of nursing home:

- residential care homes – for people who need some help with personal care (washing, dressing, etc.) and day-to-day living, but do not have round-the-clock nursing needs
- nursing homes – for people who require more dedicated nursing care

Some homes offer facilities for both residential and nursing care. Change can be unsettling for people with dementia, so even if your relative does not yet need nursing care, you may want to consider choosing a home that offers it, to minimise the amount of change they may have to cope with later.

Also consider a home's general facilities, such as whether there are en-suite rooms or toilets nearby, if the bedrooms are spacious enough to accommodate personal items of furniture or there is a secure garden.

Some homes specialising in dementia care have dedicated dementia floors or units. Ask whether this is the case, if residents are encouraged to decorate their rooms with their own pictures and other familiar items and whether the home offers sensory facilities to stimulate or calm residents with dementia.

Staff

One of the first questions to ask is whether staff at the home you are considering are sufficiently trained in dementia care.

You should also ask the home manager whether they carry out a care assessment before offering potential residents a home to ensure that their needs can safely be met.

Given the importance of an active and enjoyable life to someone's overall wellbeing, do also check whether the home has a full-time activities co-ordinator who specialises in providing engaging and stimulating activities for people with dementia.

In general, look at how the staff members behave towards the residents. Do they know them by name, engage them in conversation and treat them with respect and dignity? How do the residents respond? Do you see staff smiling and talking to each other?

CQC reports

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is the organisation responsible for monitoring, inspecting and regulating health and social care services, including care homes. They set the benchmark for good and outstanding care with standards that homes must achieve. They inspect care homes regularly, grading them according to four levels: outstanding, good, requires improvement and inadequate.

When researching potential care homes, it is a good idea to look at their latest CQC report to find out how they have been rated. Most

homes publish them on their own websites, or you can find these inspection reports at www.cqc.org.uk/search/services/care-homes on the CQC website.

Meals and nutrition

Ask about how residents' food choices are catered for, and whether any particular religious, ethnic or cultural needs are met.

Is food freshly prepared on the premises or brought in? Can the home accommodate particular likes and dislikes and food allergies/intolerances? Do residents have a choice about whether to eat their meals in the dining room or in their own room? Are plenty of snacks and drinks available throughout the day for those who cannot eat a full meal at a particular time?

Homes catering for people with dementia should understand their particular dietary requirements and how to help those who have difficulty chewing or swallowing, or who are simply not hungry at conventional mealtimes.

For more information about food and nutrition for people with dementia, visit: www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library

Activities and wellbeing

Staying active and being involved in stimulating activities is very beneficial for the overall wellbeing of people with dementia. A good care home will have at least one dedicated activities co-ordinator, if not a whole team, who will plan a weekly schedule of trips, visits

Choosing the right care home

and activities including exercise, singing, crafts, gardening and cookery. They will usually do most of this themselves with the help of visiting specialists in exercise and music. Ask to see a home's recent activities schedule and take a more detailed look at the activities or trips out on offer.

Some homes have a dedicated in-house hairdressing salon where residents can enjoy regular hair and beauty treatments, another important aspect of their wellbeing.

For more information on how to choose the right dementia care home for you, click below:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/dementia/care-homes

www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-support/publications-and-factsheets/selecting-moving-care-home



When you visit a home with or on behalf of your relative, it is a good idea to take a list of questions and requirements (such as our checklist below) so that you can make the most of your visit and really get a sense for whether or not they are likely to be happy there.

Location

- Is it easy for friends and family to get to, with plenty of free on-site parking or public transport?
- Is there good wheelchair access into and throughout the building and grounds?
- Are there shops and other facilities nearby?

Environment

- Do the buildings and grounds look well maintained?
- Does it feel inviting and have a nice view?
- Are all the rooms well decorated and do they appear clean?
- Are lounges arranged to encourage conversation in groups?
- Does it smell of fresh air, rather than air freshener masking other smells?
- Are the rooms a comfortable temperature?
- Can you personalise your room with favourite pictures, ornaments and small items of furniture?

- Is there an en-suite bathroom or wet room?
- Does the home have relevant equipment such as hoists?
- Are the building and grounds secure?

Staff

- Are the staff welcoming and friendly?
- Is there a manager, with a senior member of staff on duty at all times?
- What is the ratio of staff to residents during the day, at night and at weekends?
- Can residents choose if they prefer to have a male or female carer?
- Do the staff know their residents well, and are they interested in their history and preferences?
- Are all staff trained in dementia care?
- How often are staff trained, and by whom?

Residents

- Do the residents seem relaxed and happy?
- Can they have visitors whenever they want?
- Do other residents seem to have similar care needs to your relative?
- If care needs increase, can the home still meet them?

- Do residents have a particular member of staff responsible for their individual care needs?
- How does the home support residents with sensory impairments or dementia?
- Is the home sensitive to residents' concerns and fears over issues such as flooring and reflections?
- Can residents choose their routine – like when they get up and go to bed?
- Can they choose whether to have a bath or a shower, and how often?
- Does the home use visual signage to help residents with dementia?
- What activities are on offer for residents with dementia? Is there a sensory room/area?

These are some of the most common questions that our Canford Healthcare home managers get asked during show arounds.

For a more detailed checklist, click:

www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/information-guides/ageukil5_care_home_checklist_inf.pdf

One of the big questions around choosing a care home for yourself or your loved one is – how will it be paid for?

Depending on your personal circumstances, there are many different answers, and we understand that it not always easy to find your way around the different possibilities.

We have put together a more comprehensive finance guide at www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library.

Who will pay?

The care needs assessment also acts as the first step towards determining who will pay for care.

Local authority support is means tested. So if your assessment shows that you need care services, your local authority will look at your finances to determine whether you should pay some, or all, of the cost of your care. If your local authority has assessed you as needing care, they will carry out the financial assessment. To find out more about how your local authority does this, you should contact them direct or visit www.gov.uk/apply-needs-assessment-social-services.

Most people, even those eligible for some help from the NHS or their local authority, will need to cover some of the cost of their care. Currently, if you have savings or property worth more than £23,250 you are likely to have to pay at least some of your care home costs from your own income or by re-mortgaging or selling any property that you may own. If you have assets worth between

£14,250 and £23,250 then the local council will fund some of your care with you contributing the rest.

If you have savings of less than £23,250 and a property, your local authority must disregard the value of your property for the first 12 weeks of your moving into the care home on a permanent basis.

In these circumstances the local authority will pay your care home fees for 12 weeks or until your property sells, if sooner. How you choose to fund your care is very much based on your own personal situation, so we advise you to get independent financial advice from a qualified source.

NHS continuing healthcare

You may also qualify for care funded by the NHS, which can pay for some or all of your care if your needs are specifically health related. Your needs will be assessed and your own views about what support you need will be taken into account. Talk to a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional, who will carry out an initial assessment.

If you are not assessed as eligible for NHS continuing healthcare, you may still be eligible for NHS-funded nursing care. This pays a flat-rate contribution towards the cost of your care directly to the nursing home.

For more detailed information about NHS and local authority care assessments, eligibility criteria and financial assessments, click:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support

This leaflet is part of a series designed to help people understand more about dementia – the different types, getting and living with a diagnosis, experiencing a full life with dementia and how to find the best dementia care for you or a loved one.

Visit our resource library for our other leaflets:
www.canfordhealthcare.co.uk/library

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