



North Central Health Care

Mount View Care Center

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How to Choose a NURSING HOME



[www.norcen.org/Skilled Nursing](http://www.norcen.org/SkilledNursing)

Where to Start

Once your family has considered every alternative and has settled on a nursing home as the right decision for your loved one, choosing the right one starts with four general principles: The ideal place will be convenient to as many family members as possible. It will provide high-quality care if your loved one has a chronic condition such as dementia or physical disability. It will offer them a welcoming, supportive environment. And its cost will fall within a range that a combination of savings, Medicare, Medicaid, and perhaps long-term care insurance can comfortably absorb.

Do Your Research

Visit trusted websites like www.medicare.gov/care-compare where you can find links to information to educate yourself about all the nursing homes in your area. Start with geography by searching your first choice of location to generate a list of homes and see at a glance their ratings of one to five stars in three critical respects:

- The kind and amount of nurse staffing the home provides;
- The home's diligence in meeting state health and safety standards;
- Performance in key medical/behavioral measures, like the percentage of residents receiving annual flu shots and whether residents receive sufficient help with daily activities.

Visit Each Nursing Home

After reviewing each nursing home's pros and cons, you should have narrowed your search down to manageable number of options. Nest, prune the list by visiting the homes, asking tough questions, and being attentive to each home's personality and attitude toward its residents. Arrange repeat trips to remaining options at different times and on varying days of the week than when you first visited for an accurate sampling of care.



Consider Safety

Your loved one's safety and health trump all other considerations. If you discover that a home's online evaluation included safety and health violations, you will want to ask administrators how they were handled.

"The mere fact of a violation need not rule out a home. It may have earned a lower rating because of a violation that was corrected quickly—such as a low-pressure fire extinguisher that was replaced within a day—or a violation could be serious and not so easily resolved." – Tom Burke, Spokesman for the American Health Care Association (AHCA).

"Safety hazards aren't always obvious. For example, you should look for frayed carpets and other potential causes of a fall." – Barbara Glickstein, a registered nurse and co-director of the Center for Health, Media & Policy at Hunter College in New York City.

Consider Staffing

Adequate staffing is critical to a safe and healthy environment. Without enough nurses and aides, care suffers. A resident with shaky hands who doesn't get the help she needs at meals can become malnourished. An infirm resident who has to wait to get help with toileting can develop a urinary tract infection that could progress to a life-threatening blood infection or kidney failure. Staffing ratios displayed on Best Nursing Homes indicate the time nurses at different levels spend with patients on average.

Burke recommends focusing on "consistent assignment," meaning whether nurses and aides care for the same residents on most of their shifts. If residents can see the same caregivers most of the time, they can build relationships and will feel more comfortable and secure. AHCA recommends that individual staffers care for the same residents on at least 80 percent of their shifts. You should ask administrators whether their caregivers work with the same residents. Ask residents and their families, too.

Consider Cost

In the end, a home has to be affordable. A year in a nursing home now costs an average of close to \$100,000, and not all charges are obvious. Some homes, for example, tack on fees for physical therapy or dentist appointments. Medicare only pays for short stays following hospitalization, and Medicaid—which not every home accepts—requires depleting most of a resident's assets. Regardless of the expense, you won't want to economize in ways that compromise your loved one's quality of life.



Consider Connections

Nursing homes that treat their residents well tend to have solid connections with the community, Lutz says. Families should find out whether homes have ongoing relationships with schools or local houses of worship. Maybe Dad can't play the piano any more, but hearing student recitals might rekindle some of that same spark.

Consider Activities

"Find out other ways the staff keeps residents occupied throughout the day. You don't want Mom in the hall in a wheelchair all day" - Sharon Brangman, Division Chief of Geriatrics, SUNY Upstate Medical in Syracuse, N.Y.

"Don't ignore similar personal preferences and habits your loved one holds dear. Religious practices, such as pastoral care or kosher meals, could be the most important factor to your loved one" - Jennifer Brown, Director of Admissions, Methodist Home & Forest Side Assisted Living.

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