

How safe an elderly loved one is at home is always a concern for caregivers. Falls remain the greatest source of injury to older adults. We developed this Home Safety Checklist to make it easier for caregivers to evaluate their loved one's home. This format will allow you to work your way through the interior and exterior of their home, and document any concerns that need to be addressed.

We have a checklist for use at the bottom of this document.

Advantages Of Assisted Living

If you are a caregiver exploring senior care options for a loved one, you have likely considered an assisted living community. Here are some advantages to consider:

Assisted Living Advantages

- Safe Environment designed to support physical limitations and mobility
- Support and assistance from caregivers on-site 24/7
- Life enrichment programs help residents remain active and engaged
- Safe and secure "Sweet Memories" program for those living with dementia
- Nutritious meals and snacks
- Laundry and housecleaning services provided
- Transportation service available
- Support with activities of daily living (bathing, dressing, etc.)
- Help managing medications
- Home Care Advantages
- Support to allow older adults to remain in their own home for as long as possible
- Caregiver support can be arranged for 2 to 24 hours a day
- Sitting services to assist with socialization
- Assistance to help keep an older adult with dementia safer at home
- Bed & Bath visits to assist with bathing and dressing
- Companion care aides can help with light housekeeping, meal preparation, laundry, and transportation
- Medication reminder service

Assisted Living Community Visit Checklist

- **The Cleanliness Factor.** Is the exterior of the community well maintained? Is the interior clean and free of odors? Pay attention to the cleanliness of the common areas and the kitchen and dining room, as well as resident rooms. The cleanliness factor also extends to residents. Do they look clean and well groomed? Are they wearing clothing appropriate for the time and day and for the season? (i.e. are they still in their pajamas at 3:00 in the afternoon or wearing shorts in the winter?)
- **The Friendly, Engaged Environment.** Do staff members make eye contact with you as you tour the community? Do they greet residents in a friendly manner and know their names? Does the environment feel positive? Are residents engaged or slumped over in wheelchairs around a television?

- **Personal Assistance & Support.** Is staff available around the clock? Are they onsite or on call? Are caregivers given background checks? What kind of orientation and on-going training does the staff receive? Is there a physician or medical director that visits residents or do they have to visit an off-site physician? Ask them what their resident to staff ratio is. Ask about the turnover in staff. How long has the average caregiver been with them?
- **Security.** Are exterior doors and windows kept locked in the evenings? Are there any additional security personnel overnight? Ask about any problems with crime in the area. How are emergencies handled? What about within the community.
- **Monthly Fees.** Are all care charges and services included in the monthly fees? If not, get a detailed breakdown of what is included. Ask what additional charges you should anticipate and budget for each month. Finally, ask what will happen when the day comes that your loved one needs additional care and services. Will they be required to move to Roseleaf's skilled nursing? How much will that typically cost and how much notice will you be given of the increase?
- **Dining Services.** The monthly fee will typically include all three meals. But there are still several questions you need to ask regarding meals. How do they accommodate special dietary needs? Will there be any additional fees for that? Does someone remind and/or escort residents down to the dining room? Are snacks and beverages available throughout the day? Is there a registered dietitian who oversees menu planning?
- **Life Enrichment.** Are meaningful activities and events planned each day? Are there any opportunities for community outings (shopping, movies, etc.)? How many staff members help with activities? How do they accommodate the physical limitations your loved one has?
- **Talk with Staff, Residents and Visitors.** As you visit communities, a good way to gain insight is to introduce yourself to other family members you see there and to residents if that feels appropriate. Ask them how long they or their loved one has lived there. What do they like about the community? What would they like to see improved?

Tips For Selecting A Memory Care Community

Understanding and exploring memory care options for your elderly loved one can be daunting. A family searching for Alzheimer's assisted living faces the challenge of finding a community where the philosophy of care matches the family's personal goals for their loved one.

Tip #1: Have an Understanding of Where Your Loved One Is

Try to be objective about where your loved one is in the disease process. Their primary care physician or the neurologist involved with their Alzheimer's diagnosis can probably help. Once you feel you understand what their basic needs for a memory care assisted living are, it is time to start calling. You should plan to spend quality time asking each of your local communities a few general questions (availability, pricing, expertise in memory care, etc.). A rule of thumb in searching for Alzheimer's care is that you may have to drive further to find a quality community than you would if you were looking for a traditional assisted living.

As you make your calls to get to know the communities, take good notes. After a few calls, it may become difficult to remember the details about each community. Set your goal to find at least three or

four communities to visit in person. It is generally not a good idea to visit less. You want to have a few to compare so you can be confident you are making an educated choice.

Tip #2: Visiting a Memory Care Assisted Living Community

Once you begin touring assisted living facilities, one thing to remember is that it is good to ask memory care specific questions. Families are often worried that asking questions about a particular behavior their loved one has will keep them from being accepted into a quality community. In most cases, the behavior is not unique to them. It is part of the disease. Communities that work with residents suffering from Alzheimer's and dementia know how to support what may seem like a troubling behavior to a family. For example, approaching an Alzheimer's resident from the side may startle them and cause them to swing their arm out from the side. Caregivers who work with Alzheimer's residents each day know that peripheral vision is often lost as the disease progresses. Approaching from the front and saying their name as you approach is a best practice.

After your visits have helped you find your favorite community, plan to re-visit it in the evening and/or on the weekend. You want to make sure that the quality of care is just as good at those times as it is on a weekday.

Tip #3: Does the Environment Support Independence

Alzheimer's and dementia experts usually agree that an environment that works best is one that supports a resident's remaining abilities. Structuring it with cues that help them navigate their way around on their own (i.e., color coding hallways, memory boxes outside each resident's room, etc.) helps to maintain independence. Having signs at eye level to accommodate a downward gaze is another example.

Tip #4: Make Sure You Understand the Total Cost of Care

Assisted living costs are sometimes confusing to families. Price structures vary from community to community. Some have a flat fee that includes all levels of care and all services. Others use a fee for the apartment you select, a level of care charge and a la carte costs for services (transportation to appointments, costs for personal laundry, etc.). Make sure you understand all of the costs you will be responsible for each month.

Memory Care Community Visit Checklist

- **The Cleanliness Factor.** Because of the physical changes Alzheimer's disease causes, keeping residents and the community clean and odor free can be challenging. But good assisted living communities have programs in place to do so. As you tour the program, notice if the residents look clean and well groomed. Also pay attention to common areas like the shower room and the dining area. Do they look well maintained?
- **A Supportive, Secure Environment.** Are doors and windows secured? If a resident accidentally wanders out of the secured areas, is there an alarm that sounds or how is staff alerted? Is the environment calm, peaceful and free from excessive overhead paging? Agitation and confusion can be made worse by a noisy environment. Is there an outdoor area for memory care residents that is open but secure? Are restrooms easily accessible?

- **Life Enrichment.** Daily structure helps those living with Alzheimer’s disease or a related dementia to maintain their independence. Notice if the memory care program calendar supports a consistent schedule of planned activity from wake up to bedtime. Are there activities planned that support an individual’s lifetime interests and current abilities? For example, if a resident was an accountant, a “tax time box” with a calculator, paper and pencils for them to use would be appropriate.
- **Caregivers Count.** Having consistent caregivers who are trained specifically in supporting those with dementia and Alzheimer’s disease is important. Ask the communities you visit what their turnover rate is and how long the average caregiver has been with them. Also ask how much initial training a caregiver receives and how much additional training they receive each month or year. Is there a program director that has oversight for the memory care program? If not, who would be your contact person for questions or concerns about your loved one?
- **Talk with Other Families.** The best way to get a true picture of family satisfaction with a community is to introduce yourself to other families you see on your visits. Ask them what they like and dislike about the community. If you don’t meet any families on your visits, ask for a list of families who might be willing to talk with you.
- **Dining Services.** Because Alzheimer’s disease and dementia cause physical changes, communities need to make accommodations to maintain nutrition and hydration. You may see a dark table cloth on a table and a brightly colored plate. That contrast allows residents to clearly see the plate of food against the table. Finger foods are sometimes served if a resident is no longer able to use silverware. Ask the communities what they do to support residents. How do they make sure nutritional needs are met? And how do they keep memory care residents hydrated?
- **Monthly Fees.** Memory care communities are generally a bit more expensive than traditional assisted living. But those additional costs usually cover more individualized programming and lower resident to staff ratios. Make sure you understand what the costs are and what you will be responsible for paying in total each month.

Home Safety Checklist

SAFETY ISSUE

CONCERNS TO ADDRESS

Inside Safety

Stairways are hazard-free

Stairways have good lighting that can be turned on at both the top and bottom of the stairs

Stairways have secure hand rails

The home is throw rug free

Carpeting and thresholds between rooms are level and secure

Working smoke detectors are in place on each level of the home

Carbon monoxide detector is in place

A small, easy-to-use fire extinguisher is in place in the kitchen

Furnace has twice a year inspection

There are no extension cords running across carpets or floors creating a tripping hazard

Furniture arrangements allow for easy mobility around the room

Water heater is set at a safe temperature to prevent burns

Good lighting is easily available in every room

Secure grab bars are in place near the toilet and tub in each bathroom

Bathtub and shower is modified to allow fall free access

A raised toilet seat is in place if needed

Night lights are in place in bathrooms, hallways, stairways and kitchen

Knobs on stove can be turned on/off without reaching over the burner

Pathway around bed is clear and clutter-free

Grab bar near bedside to help get in/out of bed without leaning on furniture that may tip over

Phones in all rooms

Flashlights near bedside and in living areas

Home alarm or medical alert system

Medication management system in place

Non-skid shoes and slippers

Exterior Safety

Steps and stairways have secure handrails

Exterior doorways have motion sensitive lights

Snow removal plan that includes treating ice on walkways and stairs is in place for winter

Sidewalks are free of cracks that may present tripping hazards

General

All exterior doors and windows lock securely

Home alarm system decals and signs in plain view to discourage break-ins

Other Notes