

Choosing an Alzheimer's Disease/Dementia Community

Knowing what to do and where to turn for help when our loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (AD) or related memory impairment/dementia can be very confusing. Due to the progression of the disease and the symptoms that typically accompany it, more help may be required than can be provided at home. The physical strength of the primary caregiver, the demands of work and family, the availability of financial resources and the ability of the caregiver to provide security and stimulation to the person with Alzheimer's are all factors that must be weighed carefully. Often the choice to place the individual in a care facility is made at the last minute in a crisis situation. But with proper planning and the use of a few guidelines, you can make the decision that will best suit you and your loved one's needs before the situation reaches a crisis level.

Today there are a variety of programs designed specifically to meet the needs of people with Alzheimer's disease, dementia, and related memory impairments. These include adult day care, assisted living, home health care, skilled nursing care, and special care units within nursing homes. It's important to assess your senior loved one's requirements prior to beginning your search, and we recommend that you visit at least three programs to determine which option is right for your particular situation. As you visit each facility, weigh the factors listed under each of the following categories.

PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS:

- Encourages resident independence and functioning
- Ensures dignity and individual expression
- Ensures resident safety
- Provides peace of mind
- Reduces confusion and agitation
- Minimizes the use of physical restraints and medications
- Promotes family involvement

INDIVIDUAL PLAN OF CARE:

- Comprehensive assessment addresses the resident's current and changing needs
- Personalizes a plan of care for each resident
- Planning process involves resident, family, interdisciplinary care team, and physician
- Regular reassessment of needs

STAFF:

- Full-time program director
- Staff well educated in Alzheimer's disease process and care techniques
- Ongoing specialized staff training and education
- High staff-to-resident ratios on all three shifts
- Consulting psychiatrist, medical director, and other specialties
- Interdisciplinary team approach
- Licensed nurses direct care

STRUCTURED PROGRAMMING:

- Individually tailored activities scheduled seven days a week
- Activities focus on resident's strengths
- Active and passive program from life skills to exercise, music, art, current events, and social activities
- Short, flexible and success-oriented activities
- Large group, small group and one-on-one activities

ENVIRONMENT:

- Self-contained, secure, cheerful yet calm atmosphere
- Enclosed courtyard/backyard
- Dedicated dining, activity and private areas
- Uncomplicated floor plan and visual cues to help residents stay oriented
- Easily accessible bathrooms in common activity area
- Simplified, soothing and homelike atmosphere

RESIDENTS:

- Engaged in activities
- Appear comfortable
- Well-groomed
- Settled, well adjusted

FAMILY SERVICES:

- Family support group meetings
- Ongoing education, support and counseling
- Family conferences and involvement in care planning
- Opportunities for families to socialize

DINING AND NUTRITION:

- Individually tailored food and nutrition plans created to individual's needs and capabilities
- Modified menus
- Between-meal snacks and drinks
- Innovative food presentation techniques that ease and encourage eating
- Family-style dining
- Special adaptive utensils
- Family welcome to eat with resident