

Choosing An Assisted Living Facility

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(NAPSA)—Assisted living (AL) is a residential option for older adults who are too frail to live independently, but do not need the 24-hour skilled nursing and medical services of a nursing home. AL facilities offer a combination of supportive, personal and health-related services designed to maximize the resident's independence, privacy, dignity, choices and safety.

Facilities typically provide three meals a day in a common dining room; housekeeping and personal laundry services; assistance with bathing, dressing and toileting; 24-hour security and staff availability; social and recreational activities; access to health and medical services (transportation may or may not be provided at no cost); and medical supervision or assistance. Costs vary with the type of unit and intensity of service needed by the resident, and may include additional charges for special help.

When considering a particular AL facility, ask for written material, particularly the "resident" or "service" agreement that describes, at a minimum, the services, prices, extra charges, admission, retention and discharge criteria, staffing, programs and services. Think about your current and future health needs and interests and ask about continued eligibility if your health deteriorates. In most facilities, a new resident will retain his/her community physician, who performs the pre-admission and ongoing assessments that the person is eligible and can safely reside in an AL facility.

Questions to ask include whether there are registered nurses on site; the kind of medication assistance provided; if the services of a rehabilitation therapist are provided or arranged; the number of awake and available staff at night; and if there is a resident council and a complaint or grievance process. Find out if the facility is affiliated with a particular hospital or nursing home and if there



An assisted living facility may be the right place, but be sure to choose the right one for you.

are reduced charges while temporarily out of the facility for medical and/or skilled nursing care.

Visit a prospective facility several times and at different times of day. Look at its décor, try to get a sense of the atmosphere, staff warmth, residents' appearance, overall cleanliness and absence of unpleasant odors. Get a sense of the floor plan and if hallways, doors and elevators can easily accommodate wheelchairs or walkers.

Go into the dining area and observe the presentation of meals for variety of foods, attractiveness, and amount and for staff assistance. Can the door to a resident's apartment or unit be locked? Observe whether residents can bring some of their own furniture, hang their pictures, have a telephone and have a private bathroom. Find out the rules regarding smoking, eating in the room, stay-over guests and pets.

Assisted living is a lifestyle change. It is like moving to a new neighborhood and has all the complexity and anxiety associated with a new physical, social and cultural environment. For more information and guidance on choosing a facility, visit the Web sites at www.aarp.org, www.alfa.org and www.ncal.org.

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