



Aging 101: Assisted Living

As our loved ones age, they tend to approach a time (some, more quickly than others) when they cannot live comfortably on their own anymore. Many families will attempt to keep their elderly members in their own home for as long as possible, making personal sacrifices to help achieve this goal. Eventually, however, most people reach a time when exploring options for assisted living is the most reasonable thing to do. When faced with finding the best facility to entrust the care of a loved one to, many people can become overwhelmed. Here are several points to consider as you plan for the future.

Assisted Living vs. Nursing Homes

First, it is important to note the difference between assisted living facilities and nursing homes. Nursing homes can be thought of as a step down from staying in a hospital. Seniors in nursing homes typically need around-the-clock nursing care and have serious difficulty with all or most of their daily tasks. These facilities are regulated by individual state governments in the U.S. and employ only licensed and registered nurses. Admission to a nursing home requires a physician's order, something not necessary for admission into an assisted living facility.

Assisted living facilities tend to house mostly independent seniors who are quite healthy and need help with only a couple (or several) daily tasks. Senior citizens living in these communities receive a level of care that is between independent living and a nursing home. The crucial differences to note here are that assisted living facilities are generally not licensed to provide medical services while nursing homes are, and assisted living facilities house highly to moderately independent seniors while nursing homes are for people who have lost their independence.



What Makes a Good Candidate for Assisted Living?

Though the type of residents differs from facility to facility, most people living in an assisted living community share several qualities. People living in these communities should be able to still handle a large amount of their daily activities on their own or with minimal assistance. Assisted living facilities tend to house more residents per worker than nursing homes. For this reason, people who require constant surveillance and/or assistance are not good candidates for assisted living communities because they simply will not get the quality (and quantity) of care they need. Seniors who wish to maintain as self-sufficient a life as possible as they age, with the crutch of assistance always available if needed, are the perfect candidates for assisted living facilities.

What Services can I Expect from an Assisted Living Facility?

As was referenced earlier, assisted living facilities are not regulated by the federal government in the United States. Because of this, each facility can be quite different regarding the type of services they provide and the cost that comes with each additional service. Most residences, however, can be expected to provide meals, housekeeping, and assistance with basic daily activities such as bathing and dressing. Some facilities will provide health-related services from registered nurses at an additional cost, though not to the same degree as nursing homes. For some people, the biggest draw of an assisted living community is the social aspect. Many facilities provide social activities and opportunities for elderly residents, reducing the loneliness that often comes with living alone or in a nursing home.

As many people are aware, assisted living can be quite expensive. Most people end up paying for their loved one's stay out of pocket because Medicare does not cover the cost. This necessitates, for most people, the sometimes-tedious process of selecting between multiple candidate facilities. It can be difficult to weigh the costs of each facility against the quality and types of services they will provide a loved one; to this end, many organizations provide resources to help smooth the process (a great example can be found [here](#)). None of these resources, however, should stand in for visiting and speaking with people staying in each facility. If you think that assisted living is the right choice for your loved one, putting in the time and effort to make sure you choose the right facility will help ensure an easy and enjoyable experience for everyone involved.



Sources:

“Caregiving and Assisted Living Facility Information.” AARP, AARP, www.aarp.org/caregiving/basics/info-2017/assisted-living-options.html.

“Assisted Living vs Nursing Home.” *Senior Guidance*, www.seniorguidance.org/senior-living/assisted-living-vs-nursing-home/.