Care home checklist

Helping you to choose the right care home
Information and advice you need to help you love later life.

We’re Age UK and our goal is to enable older people to love later life.

We are passionate about affirming that your later years can be fulfilling years. Whether you’re enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we’re here to help you make the best of your life.

Our network includes Age Cymru, Age NI, Age Scotland, Age International and more than 160 local partners.

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Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

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# Contents

What this guide is about .................................................. 2
First steps ........................................................................ 3
Home details ..................................................................... 4
Location and accessibility .............................................. 6
First impressions .............................................................. 7
Staff ............................................................................... 8
Day-to-day considerations .............................................. 9
Social life and activities .................................................. 10
Having visitors ............................................................... 12
Food .............................................................................. 13
Your care needs ............................................................. 14
Contracts and fees ........................................................ 16
Complaints and feedback .............................................. 18
Useful organisations ....................................................... 20
What this guide is about

Choosing a care home is one of the most important decisions anyone can make. After all, you want to be sure that the home offers everything you or your loved one needs and is a happy and comfortable place to live in. Finding out as much as you can about a care home will help you to make an informed choice.

This handy guide contains suggestions for a number of things that you might want to consider when looking for a care home. Don’t feel you have to ask everything; think about what is most important or relevant to you or your loved one.

You may be able to find the information you need in various ways, such as by looking at the care home’s brochure, calling or emailing the home, visiting in person, or talking to the staff or manager. However you decide to approach it, you should make sure that you have found out everything you need to help you make the right choice.

For more information and advice about looking for a care home, see our free guide Care homes and our free factsheet Finding care home accommodation. In Wales, contact Age Cymru for its version of this factsheet.

The information given in this leaflet applies across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Please contact Age Scotland for its guide on choosing a care home (see page 20).
First steps

Before considering a care home, here are some key first steps to take:

• Ensure that the home provides the level of care you or your loved one needs, or could need in the future.

• Check if the home currently has any vacancies; if it has none, find out how long the waiting list is. If it has a long waiting list and you are looking for a home with availability now, then you may want to look elsewhere.

• If the home has a brochure, take a look at it before or during your visit.

• Read the most recent inspection report for the home. You can ask the home for it, or you can look for it on the regulator’s website. Care homes are regulated and inspected by the Care Quality Commission in England, the Regulation and Quality Inspection Authority in Northern Ireland, or the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales in Wales. See pages 21-22 for their details.
**Home details**
You can record the details of homes that you visit here.

**Home name:**

________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
Telephone number: __________________________________________________________________

Date of visit: ___________________________________________________________________

**Home name:**

________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
Telephone number: __________________________________________________________________

Date of visit: ___________________________________________________________________

**Home name:**

________________________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________________
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
                                                                                   
Telephone number: __________________________________________________________________

Date of visit: ___________________________________________________________________
Finding out as much as you can about a care home will help you to make an informed choice.
Location and accessibility

Will friends and family be able to get there easily?  □  □

Is there sufficient parking at the home?  □  □

If it’s important to you or your loved one, are facilities such as shops, pubs, parks and places of worship within easy reach and accessible?  □  □

Is the area noisy?  □  □

Is there good wheelchair access into and within the building, including sufficient space and wide doorways for wheelchair access?  □  □

Is there a lift? If so, is it big enough to accommodate a wheelchair?  □  □

What are the views like surrounding the home?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

What security arrangements are in place to ensure residents are kept safe?

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments:

________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________
## First impressions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the buildings and grounds well maintained?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a garden or courtyard and is it well kept?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the home and garden feel inviting and homely?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the home clean? Make sure to check the rooms, furnishings and windows too.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the home smell pleasant and fresh?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do the rooms feel hot and stuffy?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or are they cold and draughty?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are the bedrooms attractive and well decorated?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the home use signs or pictures to show where things are or what room belongs to which resident?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Any other comments:

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Staff

Are staff welcoming and interested?  □  □

Are there members of staff who speak your preferred language?  □  □

Is there a manager in post and a senior member of staff on duty at all times?  □  □

What is the ratio of staff to residents:
- during the day?
- during the night?
- at weekends?

How are staff trained?

How often and by whom?

What qualifications do they have?

How does the home ensure staff get to know about a resident’s life and experiences?

What is the turnover of staff?

Any other comments:
Day-to-day considerations

Would it be possible to change rooms at a later date? □ □

Can residents choose their daily routine, such as when they get up, go to bed, have meals or go out? □ □

Can residents choose which clothes to wear? □ □

Can residents bring their own furniture and belongings and is there enough space in the bedroom to put them? □ □

Are there safes or locked drawers in the bedrooms? □ □

Would you or your loved one have to share a bedroom or bathroom? □ □

Can residents choose whether they have a bath or shower and how often? □ □

Is the home right for you or your loved one’s cultural and religious needs? □ □

Are there single-sex facilities? □ □

What is the usual ratio of female to male patients?

What are the laundry arrangements?

Any other comments:
Social life and activities

Are residents encouraged to stay active and do as much as they can for themselves? Ask for some examples of activities provided.

How many lounges or social areas are there?

Are residents sitting around the walls or in small groups?

Are any staff sitting with the residents chatting?

Do residents seem happy and occupied?

Would you feel comfortable socialising in the home’s common areas?

Can areas and furniture be arranged to allow small groups to socialise?

Are there other residents from a similar background to you?

Are there plenty of residents you feel you could socialise with?

Do staff read to those with sight impairment?
If you have pets, can you take them with you?  
(If not, the Cinnamon Trust can help to rehouse them – see page 21.)

Does the home have its own pets?

Any other comments:

---

Social facilities – does the home have:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A radio</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A quiet lounge or reading room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A TV room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books or a mobile library</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private phone facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared phone facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone reception</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared computers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet reception in the bedrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdressing services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An outdoor seating area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Social activities - does the home offer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book clubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poetry clubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music or singing activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminiscence groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activities such as exercise classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An activities co-ordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An activities newsletter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrations for special occasions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outings to shops, entertainment venues, places of worship or places of interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having visitors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any restrictions on visiting times or numbers of visitors?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there facilities for visitors to stay overnight?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are young children welcome?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where can residents spend time with visitors?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Food

Which is the main meal of the day?

Where do residents usually eat?

How often does the menu change?

How are resident’s preferences or special diets catered for?

Are visitors able to visit during meal times and can they have meals?

Can residents and visitors make themselves a drink?

Is food prepared on the premises?

Is there a choice of food?

Can you see sample menus?

Can the home meet you or your loved one’s dietary needs?

Are you allowed to store food in your room?
Your care needs

Does the home assess new residents’ situations and needs before agreeing to accept them?  

Do residents seem to have a similar level of need to you or your loved one?  

Does the home have bathroom facilities that meet your needs?  

Can residents choose if they have a male or female carer?  

Are accessible toilets available in all parts of the home and easy to get to?  

Do toilets have handrails, raised toilet seats and other mobility aids?  

Are residents helped to the toilet when they need to go, if necessary?  

Is there a policy on when incontinence pads and catheters are used?  

Does the home link with a specific GP practice for residents to use?  

How often do other health staff such as opticians, dentists and chiropodists visit residents?  

Who decides when a health check-up is needed?
What are the travel arrangements for regular hospital and clinic visits and do staff accompany residents?

What happens when residents’ needs change or increase?

How does the home support those with sensory impairments or dementia?

How does the home let friends and family know if a resident is taken ill?

What support can the home provide for end-of-life care?

Any other comments:
Contracts and fees

Can you see a copy of the home’s contract and terms and conditions? □ □

Can you stay for a trial period? □ □

What happens if you’re unhappy with the home once you move in? □ □

What are the home’s fees? __________________________

Is it necessary to pay an advance payment or deposit? □ □

Is it clear how the fees are structured and calculated? □ □

How frequently are fees reviewed? __________________________

How are NHS nursing care payments accounted for in the fee structure? __________________________

How are fees collected? __________________________

Do self-funding and local-authority assisted residents (in Northern Ireland, residents assisted by a health and social care trust) pay the same rates? __________________________
Is a top-up payment required if you’re being placed by the local authority (in Northern Ireland, if you’re assisted by a health and social care trust)? You shouldn’t generally have to make a top-up payment.

☐  ☐

Are extra items not covered by the basic fees clearly identified and accounted for?

☐  ☐

What arrangements are there for handling personal money?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

How are residents’ valuables kept secure?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Are valuables covered by the home’s insurance?

☐  ☐

What are the terms for keeping your room if you have to go into hospital?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

What are the notice conditions in the contract?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Are any fees payable after a resident’s death and how soon do personal belongings need to be removed?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments:

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________

17 Care home checklist
### Complaints and feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any letters of appreciation you can read?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are details of the complaints procedure readily available?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you encouraged to give feedback?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a residents’ and/or relatives’ committee?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can the home provide names of any relatives of residents who would be prepared to provide a recommendation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How accessible is the manager?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is she/he approachable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other comments:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Is she/he approachable?

Any other comments:

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Useful organisations

Age UK
We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65
Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.
www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact Age Cymru: 0800 022 3444
www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI: 0808 808 7575
www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact Age Scotland by calling Silver Line Scotland: 0800 470 8090 (This is a partnership between The Silver Line and Age Scotland)
www.agescotland.org.uk

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW)
Regulatory body for care homes and domiciliary care providers in Wales. Can provide lists of care homes for a specific area and care home inspection reports.
Tel: 0300 7900 126
www.cssiw.org.uk

Care Quality Commission
Responsible for regulating health and social care services in England. Provides information on care homes in a specific area, care home inspection reports and an easy-to-read tick system to show whether a registered care home meets a range of essential standards.
Tel: 03000 61 61 61
www.cqc.org.uk

Cinnamon Trust
Specialist charity for older people and their pets. It can help to rehouse your pet if you’re unable to take it with you into a care home.
Tel: 01736 757 900
www.cinnamon.org.uk

Elderly Accommodation Counsel
Provides lists of care homes in different areas of the country and offers free housing advice.
Tel: 0800 377 7070
Email: info@firststopadvice.org.uk
www.housingcare.org
**My NHS**  
Search tool online allowing you to find care homes and see their ratings from the Care Quality Commission and from residents and visitors.

www.nhs.uk/service-search/performance/search

**The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority**  
Regulatory body for health and social care in Northern Ireland. Duties include regulating and inspecting nursing and residential care homes.

Tel: 028 9051 7500  
www.rqia.org.uk

**The Relatives and Residents Association**  
Supports care home residents and their relatives. Operates a helpline and has a network of local groups.

Tel: 020 7359 8136  
www.relres.org
Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, Tavis House, 1–6 Tavistock Square, LONDON WC1H 9NA. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 87 87 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/donate. If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

Personal details

Title: ___________________________ Initials: ___________________________ Surname: ___________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________

Postcode: ___________________________

Tel: ___________________________ Email: ___________________________

By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £_________________________

☐ I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick) ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa ☐ CAF CharityCard

☐ Maestro ☐ American Express

(Maestro only)

Expiry date / Issue no. (Maestro only) ___________________________

Signature X

Gift aid declaration

☐ (please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: __/__/____ (please complete). *Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI

The Age UK Group may use the information you have supplied to tell you about our other charitable services or to ask you to support our work. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland & Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from us do let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977 or by writing to us at our registered address. The registered address is Tavis House, 1–6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA.
Supporting the work of Age UK

Age UK aims to enable all older people to love later life. We provide vital services, support, information and advice to thousands of older people across the UK.

In order to offer free information guides like this one, Age UK relies on the generosity of its supporters. If you would like to help us, here are a few ways you could get involved:

1. **Make a donation**
   To make a donation to Age UK, simply complete the enclosed donation form, call us on **0800 169 8787** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved)

2. **Donate items to our shops**
   By donating an unwanted item to one of our shops, you can help generate vital funds to support our work. To find your nearest Age UK shop, visit [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk) and enter your postcode into the ‘What does Age UK do in your area?’ search function. Alternatively, call us on **0800 169 8787**

3. **Leave a gift in your will**
   Nearly half the money we receive from supporters come from gifts left in wills. To find out more about how you could help in this way, please call the Age UK legacy team on **020 3033 1421** or email legacies@ageuk.org.uk

Thank you!
What should I do now?

For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65 or visit www.ageuk.org.uk/homeandcare

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call 0800 169 18 19.

If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on 0800 169 65 65.