

# Care home checklist

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Helping you to choose  
the right care home  
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# 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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# 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

	Yes	No
Will friends and family be able to get there easily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there sufficient parking at the home?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the area noisy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there good wheelchair access into and within the building, including sufficient space and wide doorways for wheelchair access?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a lift? If so, is it big enough to accommodate a wheelchair?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What are the views like surrounding the home?		

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

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Any other comments:

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# First impressions

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

Any other comments:

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# Staff

**Yes**   **No**

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

	Yes	No
Would it be possible to change rooms at a later date?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can residents choose their daily routine, such as when they get up, go to bed, have meals or go out?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can residents choose which clothes to wear?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can residents bring their own furniture and belongings and is there enough space in the bedroom to put them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there safes or locked drawers in the bedrooms?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you or your loved one have to share a bedroom or bathroom?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can residents choose whether they have a bath or shower and how often?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the home right for you or your loved one's cultural and religious needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there single-sex facilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What is the usual ratio of female to male patients?		

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What are the laundry arrangements?

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Any other comments:

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# 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.

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How many lounges or social areas are there?

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	Yes	No
Are residents sitting around the walls or in small groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are any staff sitting with the residents chatting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do residents seem happy and occupied?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Would you feel comfortable socialising in the home's common areas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can areas and furniture be arranged to allow small groups to socialise?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there other residents from a similar background to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there plenty of residents you feel you could socialise with?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff read to those with sight impairment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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:

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**Social facilities – does the home have:**

**Yes** **No**

A radio

 

A quiet lounge or reading room

 

A TV room

 

Newspapers

 

Books or a mobile library

 

Private phone facilities

 

Shared phone facilities

 

Mobile phone reception

 

Shared computers

 

Internet reception in the bedrooms

 

Hairdressing services

 

An outdoor seating area

## Social activities - does the home offer:

	Yes	No
Book clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music or singing activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reminiscence groups	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Physical activities such as exercise classes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gardening activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An activities co-ordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
An activities newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrations for special occasions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outings to shops, entertainment venues, places of worship or places of interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Having visitors

	Yes	No
Are there any restrictions on visiting times or numbers of visitors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there facilities for visitors to stay overnight?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are young children welcome?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where can residents spend time with visitors?		

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# Food

Which is the main meal of the day?

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Where do residents usually eat?

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How often does the menu change?

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

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

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	Yes	No
Can residents and visitors make themselves a drink?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is food prepared on the premises?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a choice of food?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you see sample menus?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can the home meet you or your loved one's dietary needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you allowed to store food in your room?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

# Your care needs

	Yes	No
Does the home assess new residents' situations and needs before agreeing to accept them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do residents seem to have a similar level of need to you or your loved one?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the home have bathroom facilities that meet your needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can residents choose if they have a male or female carer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are accessible toilets available in all parts of the home and easy to get to?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Do toilets have handrails, raised toilet seats and other mobility aids?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are residents helped to the toilet when they need to go, if necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a policy on when incontinence pads and catheters are used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the home link with a specific GP practice for residents to use?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do other health staff such as opticians, dentists and chiropodists visit residents?		

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Who decides when a health check-up is needed?

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What are the travel arrangements for regular hospital and clinic visits and do staff accompany residents?

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What happens when residents' needs change or increase?

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

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

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

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Any other comments:

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# Contracts and fees

	Yes	No
Can you see a copy of the home's contract and terms and conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you stay for a trial period?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What happens if you're unhappy with the home once you move in?		
<hr/>		
What are the home's fees? _____		
Is it necessary to pay an advance payment or deposit?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is it clear how the fees are structured and calculated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How frequently are fees reviewed?		
<hr/>		
How are NHS nursing care payments accounted for in the fee structure?		
<hr/>		
How are fees collected?		
<hr/>		
Do self-funding and local-authority assisted residents (in Northern Ireland, residents assisted by a health and social care trust) pay the same rates?		
<hr/>		

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?

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How are residents' valuables kept secure?

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Are valuables covered by the home's insurance?

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

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What are the notice conditions in the contract?

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

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Any other comments:

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# Complaints and feedback

	Yes	No
Are there any letters of appreciation you can read?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are details of the complaints procedure readily available?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you encouraged to give feedback?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is there a residents' and/or relatives' committee?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can the home provide names of any relatives of residents who would be prepared to provide a recommendation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How accessible is the manager?		

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Is she/he approachable?

Any other comments:

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# Notes

A series of 20 horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

# 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](http://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](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact

**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575

[www.ageni.org](http://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](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact [resources@ageuk.org.uk](mailto: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](http://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](http://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](http://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](mailto:info@firststopadvice.org.uk)

[www.housingcare.org](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://www.relres.org)