

# How do I choose a nursing home?

Follow these 4 steps to find a nursing home that best meets your needs:

**Step 1:** Find nursing homes in your area.

**Step 2:** Compare the quality of the nursing homes you're considering

**Step 3:** Visit the nursing homes you're interested in, or have someone visit for you.

**Step 4:** Choose the nursing home that best meets your needs.

## Step 1: Find nursing homes in your area.

There are many ways you can learn about nursing homes in your area:

- Ask people you trust, like your family, friends, or neighbors.
- Ask your doctor if he or she provides care at any local nursing homes. You may be able to get care from him or her while you're in the nursing home.
- Visit [Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare](https://www.Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare).
- Use the Eldercare Locator or an Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC). See page 25.
- Contact your local senior and community activity center.
- If you're in the hospital, ask your social worker about discharge planning as early in your hospital stay as possible. The hospital's staff should be able to help you find a nursing home that meets your needs and help with your transfer when you're ready to be discharged.

## Step 2: Compare the quality of the nursing homes you're considering.

### Medicare's Nursing Home Compare

Visit [Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare](https://www.Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare) to get information on the quality of every Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing home in the country. Consider the information you find on Nursing Home Compare carefully. Use it, along with the other information you gather, to help guide your decision.

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Information on Nursing Home Compare isn't an endorsement or advertisement for any particular nursing home.

Use these resources to help you choose a nursing home:

- Call your Long-Term Care Ombudsman. See page 26.
- Call your state health department or state licensing agency. Look in the blue pages in the phone book or on the internet. Ask if they have written information on the quality of care given in local nursing homes. You can also ask for a copy of the full survey or the last complaint investigation report.
- Look at survey findings (CMS Form 2567) for the facility. They can be found on Nursing Home Compare at [Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare](https://www.Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare) and in the nursing home.

### **Step 3: Visit the nursing homes you're interested in, or have someone you trust visit for you.**

After you consider what's important to you in a nursing home, visit the nursing homes. It's best to visit the nursing homes that interest you before you make a final decision on which one meets your needs.

A visit gives you the chance to see the residents, staff, and the nursing home setting. It also allows you to ask questions of the nursing home staff and talk with residents and their family members.

If you can't visit the nursing home yourself, ask a family member or friend to visit for you. You can also call for information, but a visit can help you see the quality of care and life of the actual residents. For a checklist of things to look for when you visit a nursing home, see page 31.

### **Important things to know when visiting nursing homes**

- Before you go, call and make an appointment to meet with someone on the staff. You're also encouraged to visit the nursing homes at other times without an appointment.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Ask the staff to explain anything you see and hear that you don't understand.

Words in blue are defined on pages 29–30.

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- Ask who to call if you have more questions, and write down their name and phone number.
- If a resident or a resident's family wishes, you may talk to them about the care offered at the facility and their experience.
- Don't go into resident rooms or care areas without asking the resident and nursing home staff first. Always knock first and ask a resident before entering their room. Residents have a right to privacy and can refuse to allow you to come into their rooms.
- After your visit, write down any questions you still have about the nursing home or how the nursing home will meet your needs.

### **Here are some general things to consider when you visit a nursing home:**

- How does the nursing home help you to participate in social, recreational, religious, or cultural activities that are important to you?
- Is transportation provided to community activities?
- What kind of private spaces does the nursing home offer for when you have visitors?
- Who are the doctors that will care for you? Can you still see your personal doctors? If your personal doctors don't visit the nursing home, who will help you arrange transportation if you choose to continue to see them?
- What does the quality of care and staffing information on Nursing Home Compare at [Medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare](https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare) show about how well this nursing home cares for its residents?
- Will the same nursing home staff take care of you day-to-day, or do they change?
- How many residents is a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) assigned to work with during each shift (day and night) and during meals?
- What type of therapy is available at this facility? Are therapy staff available?
- What types of meals does the nursing home serve?

**Note:** Ask the nursing home if you can see a menu.

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- How will the nursing home make sure that your dietary needs are met?
- Does the nursing home make sure residents get preventive care to help keep them healthy? Are specialists like eye doctors, ear doctors, dentists, and podiatrists (foot doctors) available to see residents on a regular basis? Does the facility help make arrangements to see these specialists?

**Note:** Nursing homes must either provide treatment or help you make appointments and arrange transportation for you to see specialists.

- Does the nursing home have a screening program for vaccinations, like flu (influenza) and pneumonia?

**Note:** Nursing homes are required to provide flu shots each year, but you have the right to refuse if you don't want the shot, have already been immunized during the immunization period, or if the shots are medically contraindicated.

- How will you get access to oral care in the nursing home?
- How will you get access to mental health care in the nursing home?
- Does the nursing home offer care for people with dementia? What care does it offer?
- What's the nursing home's policy for the use of anti psychotic medication for people with dementia?

### Use the “Nursing home checklist” when you visit a nursing home

Take a copy of the “Nursing home checklist” (pages 31-39) when you visit to help you evaluate the quality of a nursing home. Use a new checklist for each nursing home you visit. You can photocopy the checklist or print more copies at [Medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare/checklist.pdf](https://www.Medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare/checklist.pdf).