

Assisted Living in Austin

Top 10 Things to Consider When Choosing a Long Term Care Facility

1. **Weigh Your Options: Residential Care Home, Nursing Homes and Assisted Living Facilities** – When deciding on what *type* of long term care facility is needed, there are many factors to consider when looking at options. A nursing home works well for residents who need added stimulation and who work well in a large environment. They also have nurses around the clock if your loved one needs more advanced care. Assisted living facilities encourage independent living, so this option works well for those that require minimal support. Residential care homes offer a cozy, home-like atmosphere rather than the more “institutionalized” setting. Most residential care homes are small (typically 7-8 residents maximum) creating an intimate, low employee to resident ratio. And like any other licensed assisted livings, most residential care homes are very structured and regulated.
2. **The Philosophy of Care** – An important feature to consider when “shopping” around for homes is to make sure the individual needs of each resident is addressed. You will want to look for a facility that provides regular care plan meetings for each resident and some homes may include you and other family members. These meetings will give you the opportunity to discuss the flexibility of routines and other areas of concern. Another area to consider is whether the facility takes into account each resident’s cultural, religious, or spiritual needs. Be sure to inquire about any special provisions to support their ongoing needs.
3. **Reputation of the Home** – All licensed homes are surveyed annually by the State. You should feel comfortable asking to see their survey results in order to view the deficiencies (if any), and to make a more educated decision. Additionally, there are a number of different industry organizations, so feel free to contact the organizations where the facility is a member in order to ask questions and get more information. Finally, many facilities are involved and give back to their community, so if that is important to you and your family, you may want to ask for specific examples.
4. **Examine the Costs** – Once you have narrowed down your search to your top 3 favorites, do a cost comparison. As you review pricing, be sure to keep in mind the quality of care and study the breakdown of the costs. For instance, some homes may add costs for medication assistance while others may include this cost in the monthly rate. The cost of cable and phones can be included in the monthly rate of some homes, but is an additional cost in others. These additional expenses can add up quickly. Finally, consider the deposit and whether or not it is refundable. After breaking down the cost of each facility, you can make a more educated decision.
5. **Caregiver Screening and Requirements** – Let’s face it, the caregivers providing the assistance will either make or break the assisted living facility. These individuals are the ones that will have the most daily interaction with your loved ones. Make sure to ask the home’s administrator what they look for when hiring and the specific requirements for the caregivers. Another question may be how often are criminal backgrounds checks conducted? Training for the caregivers can vary from facility to facility. Make sure you are informed on their training, certifications, and experience. Lastly, find out about employee retention and see if there’s a high turnover rate.

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6. **Location of the Facility** – This is key! Consider how close you live to the facility, traffic, and the convenience to your daily activities. Facilities are aware of those residents who receive frequent visitors. Sadly, it is typical that residents who have frequent visitors tend to get better care, so proximity is a plus. If you are unfamiliar with the neighborhood, do some research, visit local restaurants, and stores. Look into the crime rate and if there is a neighborhood watch program. Also, check to see the proximity of the nearest hospital or medical center.
7. **Appearance of the Home** – The appearance and cleanliness tells a lot about the home. Make a note of the street appearance; does it look more like a home or an institution? Visit the public restroom and see if it is clean. Is there an odor when you walk in the home? Check to see if the floor is vacuumed and the common areas organized. Check out the décor, as this will be a good indicator of when the home was last updated. Safety is another area to pay close attention to. Look for smoke detectors, handrails for safety and clear / clutter free hallways.
8. **Scheduled Activities** – Keeping your loved one active and alert should be an important thing to consider. Even if they were not active at their own home, make sure activities are provided. Check to see if there is a daily or monthly schedule posted in the home with the activities listed. Look at the activities and see if they look appropriate and entertaining for your potential resident. Look at the scheduled activities to see if they are redundant or if variety is provided. In some homes volunteers come in to conduct special programs or activities in the home, this could include interaction with children or animals.
9. **Observe the Residents** – When touring a home, be observant of its current residents. This will give you a good idea on the care being provided. A general rule of thumb is to see if the residents look happy. Do they look well kept: are they clean, are there stains on their clothes, have the men been shaved, are the ladies nails sculpted and painted? Take special note of the interaction between the residents and caregivers. A good indicator is how the caregiver handles aggressive or confused residents. It is also respectful and common for the caregivers to address the resident as Mr. or Mrs. Finally, observe the caregivers and their overall happiness. A happy caregiver usually indicates they are happy with their job. Ask the caregiver questions and see if they are friendly when spoken to and helpful.
10. **Dietary Considerations** – Food tends to be extremely important to seniors so try to sample a meal or visit during meal time. A good home will have no problem accommodating this request. While at the home, look at the kitchen and see if it is clean and smells good. Look and see how the dry goods are stored and take a look inside the refrigerator. Inside the refrigerator take note at how the food is labeled and covered. The presentation of the food is also important to observe. Consider the taste of the food, how colorful the food is, and if it is well balanced. If your loved one has special dietary needs, make sure to discuss this in your visit and see if the needs can be accommodated. Dehydration is big for residents living in assisted living facilities; make sure water is easily accessible.