

Tip Sheet #34



Finding a Nursing Home

There are no clear cut rules about the best time for finding a nursing home. Nursing home care may be needed for a variety of reasons. The reasons are never the same for all families. Below are some common reasons for nursing home care (check the ones you think may apply to your situation; add others you think may apply):

- ☐ The survivor needs extended rehabilitation
- ☐ The survivor needs special care that cannot be provided at home
- ☐ The survivor needs more care than the caregiver can provide
- ☐ There is no way to pay for the care provided at home
- ☐ The caregiver is not able to provide care because of health reasons
- ☐ The caregiver has other demands (e.g., children, spouse, job)
- ☐ The caregiver is worn out and can no longer provide care
- ☐ There are no other family members who can be caregivers
- ☐ Other (Write in) _____
- ☐ Other (Write in) _____
- ☐ Other (Write in) _____

Finding a nursing home can be very stressful for both stroke survivors and their family caregivers. Stroke survivors may fear that they are being abandoned. Caregivers may feel guilty about seeking nursing home care for their loved one.

Studies show that most families do care and that they do all that they can to avoid or postpone nursing home care. Once survivors are in a nursing home, most families visit regularly and continue to be involved in the care of their loved one.

The time may come when finding a nursing home is the most responsible decision that a stroke survivor and their family caregiver can make.

What are available options for nursing homes?

The type of care needed by the stroke survivor helps to decide the type of nursing home care. Nursing home care may be needed only for a short time, or may be more long-term. The most common types of nursing home care include:

- Short-term care in a “Skilled Nursing Facility” after 3 or more days spent in a hospital
- Long-term care in a nursing home.



How can I as a caregiver help find the best nursing home if or when we need it?

1. Find nursing homes in your area:

- ___ Ask people you trust (doctor, family, friends, or clergy)
- ___ Ask for the hospital's discharge planner, case manager, or social worker
- ___ Contact a senior citizen's center and ask for a social worker
- ___ Try Eldercare Locator (800) 677-1116 or <https://eldercare.acl.gov>
- ___ United Way call 211 <https://www.211.org/about-us/your-local-211>
- ___ Contact the Nursing Home Compare website at <http://www.medicare.gov/quality-care-finder/>. If you do not have a computer, ask a trusted family member or friend to help you.
- ___ Other (Write in) _____
- ___ Other (Write in) _____
- ___ Other (Write in) _____

2. Compare the quality of nursing homes

Check the Nursing Home Compare website, or ask a family member, friend, or someone you trust to help you explore this website:

<http://www.medicare.gov/quality-care-finder/>

For nursing homes in your area, this website provides “star” ratings for:

- Health inspections
- Nursing home staffing
- Quality measures
- Overall rating

This site also provides the names and directions of the facilities in your area, as well as certification, actual inspection reports, complaints by residents, and other information.



3. Visit quality nursing homes in your area

Use the Nursing Home Checklist as a guide. The Nursing Home Checklist lists several items to consider when visiting nursing homes.

The Nursing Home Checklist can be found at:

<https://www.medicare.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/NursingHomeChecklist.pdf>

Visit nursing homes again on a different day and time. This will help you to see different staff and activities. Maybe visit on a weekend if your first visit was on a weekday. Consider visiting at mealtimes. Possibly bring a friend or family member as a second pair of eyes. Some retirement communities have multiple levels of care from independent living to assisted living to skilled care. This may be an option if you and your survivor want to move in together where you can transition across care levels as you age.



4. Explore options for paying for nursing home care and other health care costs.

Most people who need long-term nursing home care use:

- Their own personal finances
- Long-term care insurance
- Medicaid, if they are eligible.

Medicare does not cover long-term care in a nursing home, but it does cover some skilled nursing and rehabilitation care after hospital discharge.

For suggestions on covering costs, see **Tip Sheet #23 Trying to Cover the Cost of the Survivor's Healthcare**. There is a list of financial resources that you can use to find out more on covering costs. You can also ask the hospital's discharge planner, case manager, or social worker for help on covering costs. Consulting an attorney or lawyer can also help to conserve costs and protect the survivor's financial assets.



5. Choose the nursing home that best meets the survivor's and caregiver's needs.

Include the survivor in all decisions where possible. You might also want to ask trusted family members and friends for their help. **Tip Sheet #29 Finding the Best Way to Ask Family & Friends for Help** may provide some additional suggestions. **Skill-Building Tip Sheet #SB5. Communicating with Health Professionals** might also be helpful in

getting the information that you need from health care professionals and others who work in nursing homes.



6. Monitor the survivor's care when they are in the nursing home.

Most families visit and continue to be involved in the survivor's care once they are in a nursing home.

Nursing home staff will collect health information from you and the survivor. As a family caregiver, you have the right to take part in planning the care that the survivor will receive.

Nursing homes must give you a written list of rights and protections.

Examples of these rights include:

- Freedom from discrimination
- Right to be treated with respect
- Freedom from abuse and neglect
- Freedom from restraints
- Information on services and fees
- Right to manage your own money
- Right to privacy, property, and living arrangements
- Right to medical care
- Right to have private time with visitors at any time
- To be given access to social services when needed
- The right to leave or to choose another place to live
- The right to make a complaint without fear of punishment
- To be protected against unfair transfer or discharge
- Right to form resident groups to discuss issues and concerns

If you or the survivor is concerned about the care being provided, talk with the nursing home staff about your concerns. Many times your concerns can be addressed. Talking about your concerns is important.

If you feel that your concerns are not addressed, you or the survivor can file a complaint with the nursing home, or any other person without fear of punishment. See **Tip Sheet #24 Legal Issues & Social Security** if you feel the need for legal advice.

Your survivor can move to another nursing home if needed. Talk with the nursing home staff about their rules for leaving to avoid additional costs.

When do I need to call a professional?

- Anytime you feel the need for assistance in deciding whether nursing home care is needed
- If you need help finding a nursing home or paying for nursing home care.
- If you or the survivor has concerns that are not being addressed, or you feel that your rights are being violated.



Where do I find more information?

See **Tip Sheet #8 Where to Find Resources** for a variety of resources, such as aging and disability resource centers in your area:

- Eldercare Locator (800) 677-1116 or <https://eldercare.acl.gov>)
- United Way 211 (dial 211 or <https://www.211.org/about-us/your-local-211>).

The Medicare Nursing Home Compare website at <http://www.medicare.gov/quality-care-finder/>

The Nursing Home Checklist on the next few pages was downloaded on 08/10/22 from <https://www.medicare.gov/sites/default/files/2019-10/NursingHomeChecklist.pdf>

Nursing home checklist

Name of nursing home: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Date of visit: _____

Basic information	Yes	No	Notes
Is the nursing home Medicare certified?			
Is the nursing home Medicaid certified?			
Note: "Certified" means the nursing home passed an inspection conducted by a state government agency. Medicare only covers care from nursing homes that are certified.			
Are the nursing home and current administrator licensed in my state?			
Does the nursing home have a bed available?			
Does the nursing home offer specialized services, like a special care unit for a resident with dementia or ventilator care?			
Is the nursing home located close enough for friends and family to visit?			
Are there resident policies I must follow? Will I get a written copy of these policies?			
Are there extra charges for other services, like beauty shop services?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) for more information.



Nursing home checklist

Basic information	Yes	No	Notes
Will the nursing home tell me in writing about their services, charges, and fees before I move into the home? Note: Medicare- and/or Medicaid-certified nursing homes must tell you this information in writing. Get a copy of the fee schedule to find out which services are available, which are included in your monthly fee, and which services cost extra. Then, compare nursing home costs.			

Safety & care	Yes	No	Notes
Have you checked the nursing home's star ratings on Medicare.gov?			
Is the nursing home taking action to improve quality or staffing as needed?			
Can residents still see their personal doctors? If needed, does the facility help arrange transportation for this purpose?			
Does the nursing home have an arrangement with a nearby hospital?			
Are care plan meetings held with residents and family members at times that are convenient and flexible whenever possible?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Safety & care	Yes	No	Notes
Does the nursing home's inspection report show quality of care problems or other citations (failure to meet one or more state or federal requirements)? Note: The nursing home must have the report of the most recent state or federal survey of the facility available for you to look at. These reports tell you how well the nursing home meets federal health and safety regulations. Reports can also be found on most state survey agency websites and Medicare.gov.			
Has the nursing home corrected all citations on its last state inspection report?			

Preventing abuse	Yes	No	Notes
Does the relationship between staff and residents appear to be warm, polite, and respectful?			
Does the nursing home check to make sure they don't hire staff members with a finding or history of abuse, neglect or mistreatment of residents in the state nurse aid registry?			
Does the nursing home have policies and procedures on prohibiting and reporting abuse and neglect?			
Is the nursing home taking action to keep residents safe from abuse, neglect, mistreatment, or exploitation?			
Is there information about how to report concerns about the care and safety of residents?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) for more information.

✓ Nursing home checklist

Preventing abuse	Yes	No	Notes
Is there information about how the facility responds to concerns that are reported?			
Has the nursing home been cited for issues related to abuse in the last year or two? Note: Nursing homes cited for abuse will have the following icon next to their name on Medicare.gov: 			

Nursing home appearance	Yes	No	Notes
Are residents clean, well groomed, and appropriately dressed for the season or time of day?			
Is the nursing home free from overwhelming unpleasant odors?			
Does the nursing home appear clean and well kept?			
Is the temperature in the nursing home comfortable for residents?			
Does the nursing home have good lighting?			
Are the noise levels in the dining room and other common areas comfortable?			

Nursing home living spaces	Yes	No	Notes
Is the furniture sturdy, yet comfortable and attractive?			
Are exits clearly marked?			
Are there quiet areas where residents can visit with friends and family?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Nursing home living spaces	Yes	No	Notes
Does the nursing home have smoke detectors and sprinklers?			
Are all common areas, resident rooms, and doorways designed for wheelchairs?			
Are handrails and grab bars appropriately placed in the hallways and bathrooms?			

Menus & food	Yes	No	Notes
Do residents have a choice of food items at each meal? Do they serve foods you like?			
Can the nursing home provide for special dietary needs (like low-salt or no-sugar-added diets)?			
Are nutritious snacks available?			
Does the staff help residents eat and drink at mealtimes, if needed?			

Staff	Yes	No	Notes
Do staff knock on the door before entering a resident's room?			
Do staff refer to residents by name?			
Does the nursing home offer a training and continuing education program for all staff?			
Is there licensed nursing staff 24 hours a day, including a Registered Nurse (RN) present at least 8 hours per day, 7 days a week?			
Do Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) help plan the care of residents?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Staff	Yes	No	Notes
How many nurses, including CNAs, will be available to help me during the day, at night, and on weekends? Note: The nursing home is required to post this information.			
Is there a person on staff assigned to meet my social service needs, and can I meet with him or her?			
Will staff call my doctor for me if I have a medical need?			
Has there been a turnover in administrative staff, like the administrator or director of nursing, in the past year?			
Is my primary language spoken by staff? If not, is an interpreter available or another system in place to help me communicate my needs?			

Residents' rooms	Yes	No	Notes
Can residents have personal belongings and furniture in their rooms?			
Does each resident have storage space (closet and drawers) in their room?			
Does each resident have a window in their bedroom?			
Do residents have access to internet, a computer, a personal phone, and television?			
Do residents have a choice of roommates?			
Are there policies and procedures to protect residents' possessions, including lockable cabinets and closets?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Activities	Yes	No	Notes
Can residents, including those who are unable to leave their rooms, choose to take part in a variety of activities?			
Do residents help plan or choose the activities that are available?			
Does the nursing home have outdoor areas for resident use?			
Is staff available to help residents go outside?			
Does the nursing home have an active volunteer program?			
Do I get to choose what time to get up, go to sleep, or bathe?			
Can I have visitors at any time – even early or late hours?			
Would I be able to leave the facility for a few hours or days if I choose to do so? Are there procedures for leaving?			
Does the nursing home offer the religious or cultural support I need? If not, what type of arrangements will they provide to meet my needs?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Caring for residents with dementia	Yes	No	Notes
Does the nursing home have specific policies and procedures related to the care of residents with dementia?			
If so, does the policy include the use of non-medication based approaches to care as a first attempt to respond to behavioral symptoms (which are often a means of communication) for residents living with dementia?			
What percentage of residents who have a diagnosis of dementia are currently being prescribed an antipsychotic medication?			
What's the nursing home's current rate of antipsychotic medication use?			
Does the nursing home participate in any efforts related to reducing antipsychotic medication use in nursing homes (like the National Partnership to Improve Dementia Care)?			

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) for more information.

Nursing home checklist

Go to a resident or family group meeting

While you're visiting the nursing home, we recommend that you ask if you can attend a resident or family group meeting. These groups are usually organized and managed by the residents or the residents' families to address concerns and improve the quality of care and life for the resident.

If you're able to go to a meeting, ask a group member these questions:

- What improvements were made to the quality of life for residents in the last year?
- What are the plans for future improvements?
- How has the nursing home responded to recommendations for improvement?
- Who does the group report to?
- How does membership in the group work?
- Who sets the agendas for meetings?
- How are decisions made (for example, by voting, consensus, or one person makes them)?

Visit again

It's a good idea to visit the nursing home a second time. It's best to visit a nursing home on a different day of the week and at a different time than your initial visit. Staffing can be different at different times of the day and on weekends.

Visit [Medicare.gov](https://www.Medicare.gov) for more information.