

Nursing Home Evaluation Checklist

Questions to Ask and Things to Look for When Touring a Facility | SeniorFactsGuide.com

Use this checklist when visiting nursing homes for yourself or a loved one. Visit each facility more than once and at different times of day — including evenings and weekends — for the most accurate picture of daily care.

1. Before You Visit — Research the Facility

Check Medicare's Care Compare Tool

Visit [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) and look up the facility's star rating, staffing score, health inspection history, and quality measures. Aim for 4 or 5 stars overall.

Review Inspection Reports

Read the facility's most recent state inspection report. Look for the number and severity of any deficiencies cited. Serious deficiencies are a red flag.

Check for Ownership and Enforcement Actions

Note who owns the facility and whether it has been subject to fines, payment denials, or other enforcement actions. Care Compare includes this information.

Verify Medicare and Medicaid Certification

Confirm the facility is certified to accept Medicare and Medicaid if you anticipate needing either program to help pay for care.

Ask About Current Availability and Wait Lists

Find out whether beds are currently available and whether there is a waiting list. Ask about the facility's policy on holding a bed if a resident is hospitalized.

2. First Impressions — What You See and Smell

Cleanliness and Odor

The facility should be clean and free of persistent unpleasant odors. Occasional odors may be normal but strong or pervasive smells can indicate inadequate care or housekeeping.

Overall Atmosphere

Does the facility feel welcoming and homelike or institutional and cold? Are common areas comfortable and inviting? Is there natural light?

Resident Appearance

Do residents appear clean, well groomed, and appropriately dressed? Are they engaged and comfortable or appear distressed or neglected?

Staff Interactions with Residents

Observe how staff speak to and interact with residents. Are they respectful, patient, and attentive? Do they address residents by name?

Safety and Accessibility

Are hallways clear and free of hazards? Are handrails available throughout? Are call buttons accessible in resident rooms and bathrooms?

Outdoor Spaces

Does the facility have safe, accessible outdoor areas? Are they well maintained and available for residents to use?

First Visit Notes:

3. Staffing — The Most Important Quality Indicator

- Nurse-to-Resident Ratio — Day Shift**
Ask about the number of registered nurses and licensed practical nurses on duty per shift relative to the number of residents. Higher ratios mean more individualized attention.
- Nurse-to-Resident Ratio — Night and Weekend Shifts**
Staffing often drops significantly at night and on weekends. Ask specifically about staffing during these times.
- Staff Turnover Rate**
High staff turnover is a significant warning sign. Ask how long the current director of nursing and administrator have been at the facility.
- Staff Training and Certification**
Ask what training staff receive when they are hired and on an ongoing basis. Ask whether any staff have specialized dementia care training if relevant.
- Consistent Assignment**
Does the facility use consistent assignment — meaning residents are cared for by the same aides on a regular basis? Consistent care relationships improve quality significantly.
- Response Time to Call Buttons**
Ask about the typical response time when a resident uses their call button. Consider testing this during your visit.

4. Care and Medical Services

- Physician Coverage**
Ask how often a physician visits the facility and how medical emergencies are handled. Is there a physician or nurse practitioner on call 24 hours a day?
- Specialized Care Capabilities**
If your loved one has specific needs — wound care, dementia, ventilator dependence, dialysis — confirm the facility has the staff and equipment to meet those needs.
- Medication Management**
Ask about the facility's medication management process and what safeguards are in place to prevent medication errors.
- Rehabilitation Services**
If rehabilitation is needed ask about the availability and quality of physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech therapy on site.
- Hospice and Palliative Care**
Ask whether the facility has experience working with hospice providers and whether residents can remain at the facility while receiving hospice care.
- Care Planning Process**
Ask how care plans are developed and how often they are reviewed. Are residents and family members included in care planning meetings?

Infection Control

Ask about the facility's infection control policies especially regarding common infections like UTIs, C. diff, and influenza.

5. Daily Life — Quality of Life for Residents

Meals and Nutrition

Ask to see a sample menu and if possible taste a meal. Are meals nutritious, varied, and appealing? Are dietary restrictions and preferences accommodated?

Dining Experience

Is the dining room pleasant and social? Are residents assisted with meals when needed? Are meal times flexible or rigidly scheduled?

Activities and Programming

Ask for a copy of the activity calendar. Are activities varied, meaningful, and available on evenings and weekends? Are residents encouraged to participate?

Resident Autonomy and Choice

Can residents choose their own schedule for waking, bathing, and meals within reason? Is individual preference respected?

Visitors and Family Involvement

What are the visiting hours and policies? Is family involvement in care encouraged? Are there family support groups or education programs?

Roommate Situations

If a shared room is being considered ask about the process for addressing roommate compatibility issues.

Personal Belongings

Are residents allowed and encouraged to personalize their rooms with their own furniture and belongings?

Notes on Daily Life and Atmosphere:

6. Costs and Payment

Base Monthly Rate

Get the current base monthly rate in writing. Ask exactly what is included in the base rate and what services are charged separately.

Additional Charges

Ask for a complete list of services that are not included in the base rate — such as laundry, incontinence supplies, therapy, and cable television.

Medicare Acceptance

Confirm the facility accepts Medicare and ask about the Medicare coverage period — typically up to 100 days following a qualifying hospital stay.

Medicaid Acceptance

If Medicaid may eventually be needed confirm the facility accepts Medicaid and ask about the process for transitioning from private pay to Medicaid.

Bed Hold Policy

Ask about the facility's policy for holding a resident's bed during a hospital stay and whether Medicare or Medicaid covers any bed hold days.

Rate Increase History and Policy

Ask how often rates have increased in recent years and what notice is given before a rate increase takes effect.

7. Resident Rights and Grievance Process

Residents' Rights Posted

Federal law requires that residents' rights be posted in the facility. Confirm this is visible and ask staff if you cannot find it.

Grievance Process

Ask how residents and families can raise concerns or file complaints. Is there a clear process? Are complaints taken seriously and resolved promptly?

Resident Council

Does the facility have a resident council — an organized group through which residents can raise concerns and have input on facility operations?

Family Council

Is there a family council that meets regularly? This is a strong indicator of family engagement and facility accountability.

Ombudsman Contact Information

Federal law requires facilities to post information about the long term care ombudsman program. The ombudsman provides free advocacy for residents.

Discharge and Transfer Policies

Ask under what circumstances a resident could be discharged or transferred against their wishes and what the notice requirements are.

8. Talk to Residents and Family Members

Speak with Current Residents

Take the opportunity to speak with residents directly if they are willing. Ask whether they feel safe, well cared for, and whether their concerns are addressed.

Speak with Visiting Family Members

Family members of current residents can provide candid assessments of care quality that go beyond what staff and marketing materials reveal.

Ask About Staff Consistency

Ask residents and families whether they see the same staff members regularly or whether turnover is high and faces are constantly changing.

Ask About Problem Resolution

Ask families whether concerns they have raised have been addressed promptly and satisfactorily by facility management.

Overall Impressions and Decision Notes:

Facility Comparison Rating

Rate each facility from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) in each category:

Overall First Impression: __ / 5

Cleanliness and Odor: __ / 5

Staff Friendliness: __ / 5

Staffing Levels: __ / 5

Quality of Care: __ / 5

Meals and Nutrition: __ / 5

Activities and Programming: __ / 5

Costs and Value: __ / 5

Overall Recommendation: __ / 5

This checklist is for general informational purposes only. Always verify information directly with the facility. Use Medicare's Care Compare tool at [medicare.gov](https://www.medicare.gov) to research facilities before visiting.