

What to Consider When Choosing... Independent and Assisted Living

Independent and assisted living communities offer seniors the opportunity to continue to live in their own homes while enjoying a sense of community, specialized programming, professional support for activities of daily life and a variety of other on-site amenities.

The independent and assisted living facility you choose will depend on your own unique situation. With so much variation in services, think about which are most important to you now and in the future. For example, if you value exercise, consider a community with an exercise area or in close proximity to a fitness center.

When visiting an independent and assisted living facility, consider these aspects:

Size and Location

There is no set size for an independent and assisted living community, so it's up to you if you prefer a smaller community or a busier place with more people and opportunities for socialization. Are there a variety of sizes and styles of apartments to choose from?

Location is another consideration. Is the facility you are considering part of a larger community? Are there dining, shopping, entertainment and recreational opportunities nearby?

Activities and Amenities

- Is there a regular schedule of social, educational, fitness and cultural programming that is engaging and uplifting?
- Is there a fitness center, coffee shop, library and beauty salon available onsite?
- If there is a communal dining room, what meals are served and do you have choices about what and when to eat?
- Are there comfortable spaces in which you can host gatherings for your family, clubs or organizations?
- Is free transportation available so you can attend medical appointments and houses of worship?



Myths About Independent and Assisted Living:

Myth 1: Living in a retirement community or senior apartment means losing independence.

Reality: You'll have your own space without the hassles. You'll also maintain your privacy and independence. You can furnish your apartment with your own furniture and personal items and decide how you wish to spend your days and with whom. The doors to your apartment lock are controlled by you. You should feel at home and absolutely secure in your environment.

In-Home Care

The independent and assisted living facility you choose should be a place that can accommodate your health and personal care needs today and in the future. Does the facility you are considering:

- Offer personalized plans for your care that are periodically reviewed and updated?
- Have licensed nurses and aides in the building 24/7?
- Allow you to choose only the services you want or require you to purchase a package of services?

Accessibility

Take a look at how accessible the retirement facility is, both inside and outside:

- Do you feel safe coming and going at different hours of the day?
- Are amenities outside of the facility within walking distance, or do you need transportation like a car or cart to get around?
- Can you easily get to places you frequently use such as a library, college or medical services?
- Do doors and hallways accommodate adaptive devices such as walkers and wheelchairs, and have grab bars been installed in the bathrooms?

The People

No matter what type of independent and assisted living facility you consider, make sure you connect with peers and feel comfortable in the community. When you visit, talk with some of the residents. Are they people you'd like to know better? Are support services timely, with a staff that's friendly and accessible? If there is a community dining room, sample a meal if possible, and spend time interacting with other residents.

Myths About Independent and Assisted Living - continued:

Myth 2: Moving away from my family means no one will be around to help when needed.

Reality: Most independent living facilities have built-in safety and security measures along with 24-hour staff, designed to reduce the worry that often comes from living alone. Features are in place to respond quickly in the event that you need someone to help you.

Myth 3: Moving to independent and assisted living means saying goodbye to hobbies such as gardening.

Reality: Life at an independent living facility usually means that seniors are more active than they were living alone. Many facilities have gardening programs for residents in addition to fitness programs, bingo, cards and book clubs. Studies have shown that people who are active and engaged are healthier and happier. Extensive activity programs give all residents options and choices tailored to their specific needs, desires and lifestyle. They can also reduce the isolation felt when living alone.

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