

Settling into a care home



Thank you

Independent Age would like to thank those who shared their experiences as this guide was being developed, and those who reviewed the information for us. With special thanks to George Coxon, Director of Pottles Court care home.

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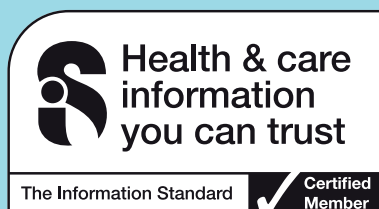
The sources used to create this publication are available on request.

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1 About this guide



Moving into a care home can feel like a big change and will inevitably require some adjustment. Whether you're moving to the home yourself, or assisting a friend or relative with their move, it's natural to have some anxieties. Taking time to think through the move and consider ways to make it a positive experience is a good way to set your mind at rest and ensure the transition is as smooth as possible.

This guide has tips on how to settle into your new home, including what friends and family can do, and how a good care home can help you to feel at home. We spoke to care home residents, relatives and staff about their experiences and we've included their suggestions and stories throughout.

This guide is for people who have chosen a care home and are about to move in. If you're still at the stage of selecting a home, read our guide **How to find the right care home.**



2 How to help the move go smoothly



Moving house is an upheaval wherever you're moving to. Moving to a care home is often particularly hard because of the change of lifestyle it brings, and because people may end up moving in a crisis, for example following a hospital admission.

“ My experiences with my mother were more dramatic because her circumstances changed suddenly. The friend who'd been living with her was taken into hospital in an emergency, and as a result everything fell apart. So I would say, if possible, plan for a move ahead of time rather than waiting for an emergency. ”

Relative of care home resident

If you can, plan ahead, as this will make the move a lot easier. Making a checklist of what you need to do, and when, will help to break up this big task and make it seem less daunting.

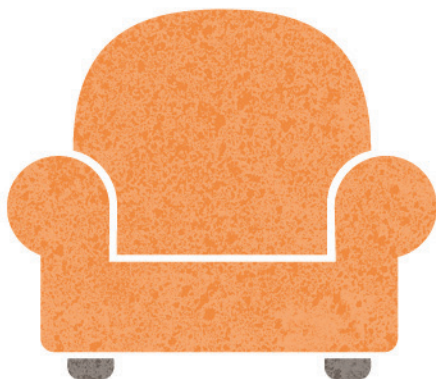
What to take with you

Living in a care home, you will probably have less space than in your current home.

Check with the care home to see whether they will allow you to bring your own furniture and whether there are any limitations on this. For instance, furniture will probably need to be fire retardant.

Think carefully about what you want to take with you and whether you will have the space for it.

Taking some personal items with you, such as your favourite armchair or treasured photos, will help you to feel more at home, but you also need to be realistic. You won't want to be living in a cluttered space, and having too much furniture in a small room could be dangerous.



“ Ask the care home to provide you with a floor plan with measurements of your room, including the en-suite if there is one. Having the floor plan and measuring the furniture you are thinking of taking can enable you to see if it will fit and not create obstructions. You could try cutting the furniture shapes out using graph paper and moving them around. ”

Care home removal services
professional

Wardrobe space will often be limited, so you may need to select what clothing to take. Clothes will need to be machine washable. Ask the care home if you need to label clothes in advance or if they do this when you move in.



“ My husband’s aunt was very confused before she went into the care home. She was allowed to take a piece of furniture so we decided to take the writing bureau. To help her settle in, we photographed this desk so we knew exactly how it had looked in her old sitting room. When we moved the bureau, we put the ornaments, photo frames and letter rack exactly where they had been before, so it would all look familiar. ”

Relative of care home resident

If you’re taking any electrical appliances with you, be aware that these may need to be safety-tested. If the care home requires electrical equipment to have a portable appliance test (PAT), they or an electrician may be able to test it for you, but might charge for this.

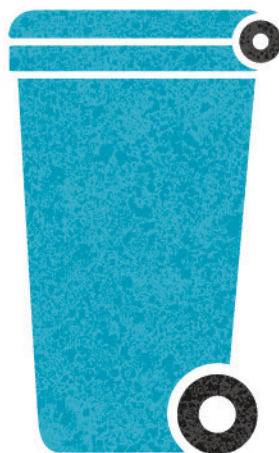
If you're taking anything valuable, check whether it will be covered by the home's contents insurance policy and take out your own insurance if necessary. If you're leaving your previous home unoccupied, check if your existing building or contents insurance will still apply or if you'll need to get unoccupied home insurance.



Clearing your home

Don't underestimate how long decluttering can take. You might want to:

- offer items to family, friends or charity shops
- arrange for your council to collect bulky items, usually for a fee, or for items to be taken to a recycling centre
- get a house clearance or rubbish removal company to take away anything you haven't been able to dispose of in other ways. Some charities, such as the British Heart Foundation, may offer house clearance services in your area.



Pets

“ We were lucky to find a home that welcomed Candy, the elderly cat, as well as my mother. They were wonderful with her. Candy couldn't go out because she was deaf but they coped with her litter tray. After Mum died, the home asked to keep Candy and she stayed there until her death. ”

Relative of care home resident

If you're used to the companionship of a pet, being able to take yours with you might be a big help. Some homes accept pets or allow them to visit and some don't,



so if you want to take a beloved pet, or avoid a home with pets, check this in advance.

If you haven't been able to find a care home that will take your pet – perhaps because you had to move in a rush – contact the Cinnamon Trust for help. They can provide long-term care for your pet and keep you in touch with regular photos and letters, and visits where possible.

The move

There's a lot to consider before the move. For example, you'll need to:

- inform everyone you need to of your change of address
- book a removal company
- pack everything you'll be taking with you securely. This will probably need to be done in stages.

If no one can help you pack, many removal companies offer packing services for a fee.

Download our **Moving home checklist** (independentage.org/moving-home-checklist) or write your own to ensure you haven't forgotten anything.



“ My aunt moved to a care home and her address book got lost in the move. It was a big loss for her and made her feel much more unsettled, because it increased the feeling that she'd lost touch with her previous life. Things like that are irreplaceable. I wish we'd made a list of things that were particularly important to her and kept more of an eye on where she packed them. ”

Relative of care home resident

Having a friendly and helpful removal company can make a big difference to how you feel on the day of the move. See if you can get personal recommendations or whether the care home can suggest a company to use. Some companies even specialise in care home removals. Check that the company belongs to a professional body, such as the National Guild of Removers and Storers (01494 792279, ngrs.co.uk). You can search for a local remover on their website.

3 Things to do when you move in



It will probably take you a while to adjust to your new surroundings. You may feel overwhelmed to start with, but remember, this is your new home and it's important that you feel comfortable there. Don't feel that you can't ask questions or request improvements if something doesn't seem to be up to scratch.

“ Look at moving into a home as an opportunity not a threat. It's another phase in your life. ”

Care home resident

Your room

“ Arrange for someone to take some personal items to your room before you move into it. This will make it feel more familiar when you arrive. ”

Care home director

Unpacking some of the familiar items you have brought with you may help you to feel more at ease. When unpacking, there may be a few things you'll need to check with the home. For example, homes will usually allow you to hang pictures on the wall but they might request that their handyman does this for you.

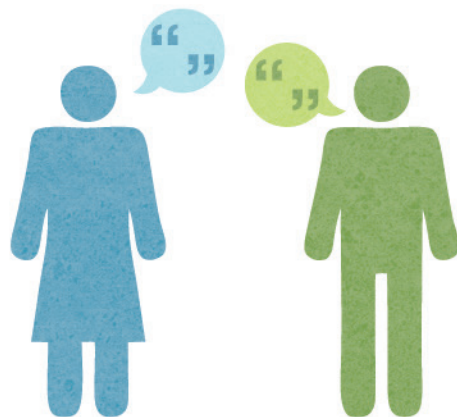
Find your way around

Getting used to the layout of the building will help you feel more confident in your new surroundings. Friends or family might want to help you find the dining room, lounge or garden before they leave. Ask the staff if you're unsure where anything is.

You might want to introduce yourself to some of your new neighbours, but take things at a pace that suits you.

Talk to the staff

Talk to the staff as soon as you can. They will want to know how they can help you and how you want to be looked after.



Friends and family can also get involved in these conversations. If you're used to getting up at a certain time, have particular food likes and dislikes, or want to dress in a certain way, let them know.

“ Good care homes want you to feel at home. You might feel you have to fit in with what everyone else is doing, but this isn't the case. If you'd like lunch in your room or to watch a particular TV programme, ask. Staff won't know what you want if you don't tell them! ”

Independent Age Helpline
adviser

If there are things you need relating to your religion or culture, staff should respect this and try to accommodate you – for example, you might want to get up at a particular time to pray. You must be treated with dignity and respect.

You and your family might want to prepare a folder of information about your life and interests that you can share with the care home staff.

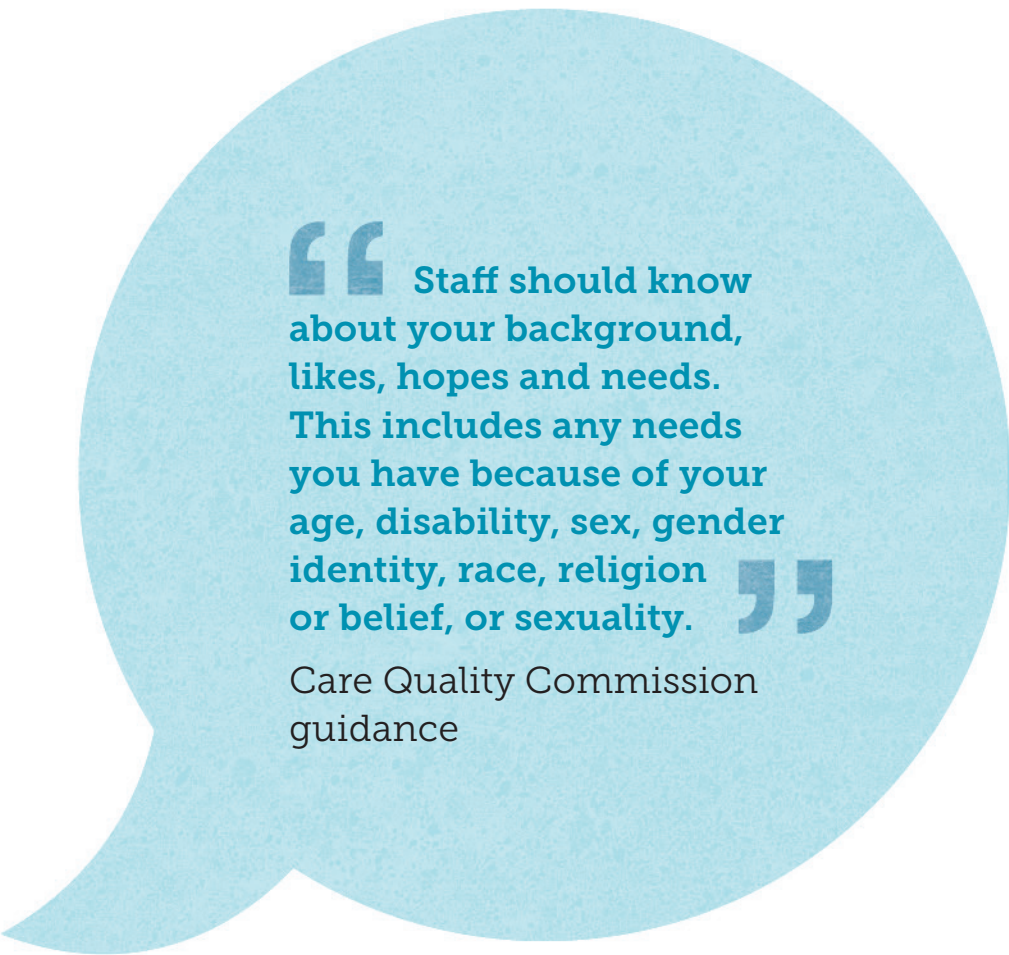
“ It helps if you can talk to staff about your interests. When my aunt moved into a nursing home, the staff found out quickly that she loved cats. The nursing home had a pet cat and they brought it to her each day as she couldn't leave her bed. One carer even printed out a picture of a kitten and laminated it before leaving it for her on her bedside table. ”

Relative of care home resident

“ One lovely thing the home did was to make a memory board where we put photos of Mum at different times in her life. They felt this helped the staff to see the real person with a life behind them. ”

Relative of care home resident

The staff and managers of the care home have a big role to play in helping you to settle in and feel at home. A good care home will be interested in your personal preferences and give you as much choice and control as possible. Staff should ask your opinions regularly and encourage you to express them.



**“ Staff should know
about your background,
likes, hopes and needs.
This includes any needs
you have because of your
age, disability, sex, gender
identity, race, religion
or belief, or sexuality. ”**

Care Quality Commission
guidance

Your care plan

When you move in, the care home will carry out an assessment of your care and treatment needs and preferences. You and the care home management will then draw up a care plan together. The care plan should be personal to

you and doesn't just cover your physical health and care needs. It should set out:


- your goals, ie things you want to achieve – eg that you want to visit children and grandchildren, or that you want to carry on gardening
- your preferences – eg that you want to have a bath in the evenings, or to stick to a particular diet
- where possible, ways in which you can maintain your independence – eg making hot drinks for yourself.

The care plan should explain how the care home intends to meet your goals and preferences. The care home staff must make every reasonable effort to meet your preferences.

Your care plan should be reviewed regularly, to make sure it reflects any changes in your needs or preferences.



Get involved



“ They’ve got very good activities. I never painted in my life and here I am doing watercolours! ”

Care home resident

Playing an active part in the life of the care home will help prevent you from becoming isolated. The activities offered by care homes vary, but consider getting involved in anything that is going on. There may be activities that tie in with an interest you already have, such as gardening groups.

Your care home may be keen to use the expertise of its residents. If you’d like to play music for the other residents or give a talk on a hobby, see if they can accommodate this.

“ Most care assistants are drawn to this sort of work because they are naturally lovely people and enjoy looking after others. But it’s easy for them to get into the habit of doing everything for you, and for you to slip into letting them. As the old saying goes, use it or lose it. Up to the age of 70, I taught music and movement classes, so I know the importance of keeping mobile. When I went into the home, I asked myself: ‘What can I do, and what do I still want to do for myself?’. Then I told them as politely as possible. Everything takes much longer, but I do my best! ”

Care home resident

It’s important that you’re involved in the life of the care home, but you should also be given enough privacy and as much independence as possible.

“ It helps to set small goals for each day to keep yourself as mentally and physically active as possible. For example, I'll walk around for an hour and do the crossword. ”

Care home resident

Keep doing what you enjoy

Concerns about loss of independence and control are common when moving into a care home. Try to keep doing the things that are important to you, whether this is going for a morning walk, having a glass of wine with your dinner, or going on day trips with your family. Homes will have their own rules but should try to be accommodating. Your care home must try to support you to maintain your independence and involvement in the community.

“ Although Dad was very muddled, physically he was in good nick and used to go for a walk outside every day. It was part of his routine and as normal as breathing. We made sure that his walks in the fresh air coincided with a care assistant doing one of her outdoor errands so that she kept an eye on him and yet he still had some freedom. ”

Relative of care home resident

Keep in touch

Stay in touch with life outside the care home. If it's possible, go on day trips with friends and family or arrange for them to visit you.



Having your own phone will give you greater independence. Consider getting a phone installed in your room; some homes will also allow mobile phones. Homes may have internet access, allowing you to stay in touch via email or Skype.

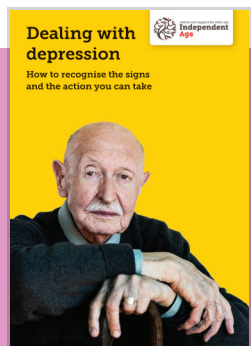


Stay positive

It's likely to take a while for you to settle in and you might feel anxious, unhappy and angry at times. But try to focus on things that are good about life in the care home. For instance:

- you should feel safe and well looked after
- you won't have to worry about chores you used to find difficult to manage
- if you fall ill or have an accident, someone will be around to help
- you'll have regular company and probably activities to take part in.

If you have feelings of depression that are particularly strong or have lasted for more than two weeks, you may want to talk to your GP. Read our guide **Dealing with depression** for more information.



4 Helping your relative or friend to settle in



Keep in touch

Seeing someone you're close to move into a care home can be difficult and it will take time for you all to get used to the situation. With the best will in the world, it may be hard for you to visit regularly, but try to keep in touch as much as you can, even if just through a phone call.

“ Now that families live so far apart, care home residents don't always get that many visits. Help carers to stimulate conversation with your relative by leaving a photograph album. ”

Care home manager

If you find it hard to make conversation, for example if your relative has dementia, staff may have ideas of how you can make the most out of your time with them.

“ Don't underestimate the power of laughter. My mother-in-law had dementia but still picked up on the jolly atmosphere of a funny programme even if she probably didn't understand the joke and was definitely too deaf to hear it! We brought in box sets of Last of the Summer Wine and Dad's Army for the home to play and she laughed along. ”

Relative of care home resident

Be accepting of the situation

It's easier said than done, but try not to feel guilty. Talk to staff, family and friends about how you are all feeling and make sure you're getting the support you need. No one makes the decision to move into a care home lightly and there are good reasons for your friend or relative to have moved. Try to focus on the positive changes. For example, you may have worried that they weren't eating properly and staff will now ensure they get regular meals.

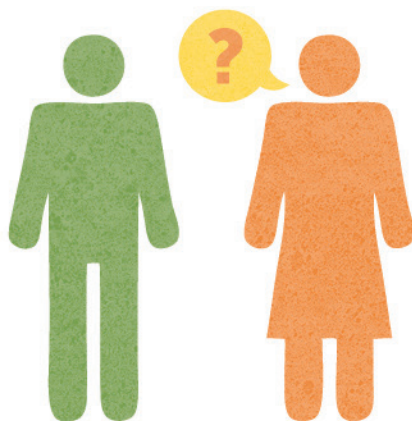
“ Try to deal with your guilt. Intellectually, you may know it's the right decision for your parent to go into a home but you may still feel you've let them down. Guilt isn't helpful and can cloud your judgement and make you and your parent negative about the whole experience. ”

Care home CEO


If negative feelings continue, you may want to consider speaking to someone such as your GP or a counsellor about how you're feeling.

Stay involved

It can be hard to see strangers caring for a family member, but you can still be involved in their care. Build a good relationship with the staff and manager: talk to them about how your friend or relative is doing, ask questions and raise concerns.



Most care homes will have meetings where staff, residents and relatives can get together to discuss matters about the care home. Try to attend these – it will give you an insight into the home's approach and help you to stay connected to your friend or relative's daily life.



**“ Communicate with
your friend or relative. Be
absolutely honest. If they
feel they have been lied
to or duped in any way,
they will not settle
in well. ”**

Care home manager

If your relative has dementia

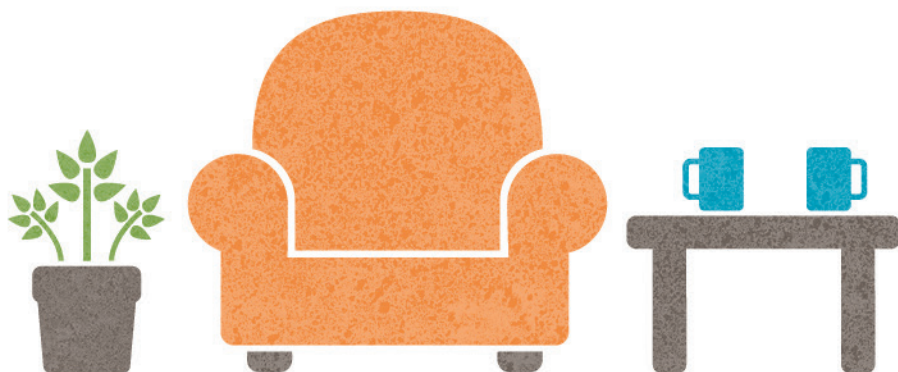
If your relative has dementia, it might be hard to talk to them about what is happening. If you're finding it difficult to discuss their new life in the care home, you might want to speak to care home staff about the best way to approach this.

Notice if something could be improved

Keep an eye on how your friend or relative is doing. If there are small adjustments that you think could make a big difference to them, speak to staff about what changes can be made.

It may be that your relative hasn't made staff aware of something that's bothering them. For example, staff might be calling them by their first name because they haven't communicated that they'd rather be called Mrs Brown. It's easy for resentment to build, so help them to communicate any concerns and encourage them to talk to staff about their preferences.

If there are any practical changes you think could help, speak to the staff about this. For example, they might be able to rearrange furniture to make it easier to get around the room.



Help out

“ If your friend is used to always watching their favourite TV programme, record it. Carers may not be able to switch the TV or radio on for your friend at the right time, but they can play your recordings in a spare moment. ”

Care home expert

The services a care home provides vary. If there's anything the home won't do that your relative would like, can you help with it? For example, most homes provide a basic laundry service but may not be able to wash delicate clothes properly or do ironing. If this is important to your relative, you might want to launder special items of clothing for them yourself.

Some care homes charge extra to accompany your relative to outside medical appointments. If you're available, you might want to go with them instead.

5 How a good care home can help you to settle in



There are a number of things that your care home is obliged to do that will help you to settle in – for example, creating a care plan for you that takes into account your personal preferences (see chapter 3). But there are also other ways care home staff and managers can help you feel at home in your new surroundings. Here are a few suggestions from those we spoke to.

“ There are ways to make it feel like home. We have everyone using the same cups, not separate cups for staff and residents. It represents how integrated we are. ”

Care home director

“ In my opinion, it's good to allow people space. It can be annoying to be all over someone when they first come into a care home and I know I would not like it. It's good to get staff to introduce themselves and obviously this is necessary for finding out things like dietary requirements and nursing information, but then leave them be to try and communicate on their own. Forced relationships do not work and can make residents angry and exhausted. ”

Former care home nurse

“ Ask if the home has a ‘buddying’ policy. This is where they introduce the new arrival to someone with a room nearby, or whom they may get along with because they’ve got something in common. It doesn’t mean those two people will automatically like each other but it’s a start. ”

Care home CEO

“ Good care is about good communication. Tiny details like whether Mr Thomas has a very sweet tooth can make him feel at home – or not. ”

Former care home manager

6

If anything goes wrong



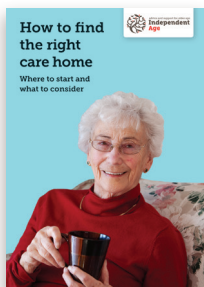
Don't be surprised if you don't settle in to your new home immediately – it will take time to adjust to life in a care home. However, if you feel that there is something about this care home in particular that won't suit you, you may want to move. If the local council or NHS are paying for your care, talk to them about this.

If you have concerns about your care, it's often best to start by raising this informally with staff, but you can also make a formal written complaint. If you're paying for your own care, raise this with the care home; if your council is paying for any of your care, you can use the council's complaints procedure. For more information, read our factsheet **Complaints about care and health services** or call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

If you're concerned about abuse or neglect, call our Helpline for advice (**0800 319 6789**).

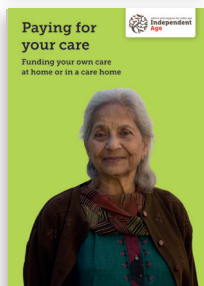
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In Scotland, contact Age Scotland ([0800 12 44 222](tel:08001244222), agescotland.org.uk).

In Northern Ireland, contact Age NI ([0808 808 7575](tel:08088087575), ageni.org).

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