

# Finding the Right Skilled Nursing Facility



**Many people with Parkinson's disease (PD) want to live at home for as long as possible. However, there may be important reasons why long-term skilled nursing care would provide a more suitable living situation for the care partner and loved one with PD.**

Although it is common to experience guilt and mixed feelings about transitioning a loved one to a skilled nursing facility, it can be the best option for the person with PD due to employment schedule, costs associated with in-home care, physical limitations or emotional health. Additionally, the household environment may not be the best option due to the layout of the home or the needs of other residents.

## **What is a Skilled Nursing Facility (Also Known as a Nursing Home)?**

A skilled nursing facility is a healthcare center with at least one full-time registered nurse on-site and a doctor on call. It provides resident access to 24-hour care from nurses and certified nursing assistants. Skilled nursing facilities provides more care than assisted living facilities, which only help with day-to-day activities.

### **Rehabilitation vs. Long-Term Care**

After a hospitalization, it is common to stay at a rehabilitation center within a skilled nursing facility to recover from surgery, injury or illness. Medicare can pay a portion of this stay under certain circumstances. During rehabilitation, physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT), speech language pathology (SLP) and social work services are offered, and certified nursing assistants are available 24 hours a day. The individual either returns home or transitions to a care facility for long-term care when the rehabilitation services end.

### **Paying for Long-Term Care in A Skilled Nursing Facility**

There are different options to pay for a skilled nursing facility stay. An individual can pay privately, use long term care insurance, use U.S. Department of Veterans benefits or qualify for Medicaid. It is important to note that Medicare does not pay for permanent stays in skilled nursing facilities.

Those who cannot pay out of pocket for a skilled nursing facility can utilize Medicaid. To review finances and payment options or learn how to qualify for Medicaid, consider meeting with an eldercare lawyer or a financial planner long before the transition takes place. To find an eldercare lawyer, visit [NAELA.org](http://NAELA.org).

If you cannot afford an elder law attorney or financial planner, it might be helpful to utilize other resources, including a social worker at Area Agency on Aging office for your area. To find the closest office to you, call 1-800-677-1116 or visit [ElderCare.acl.gov](http://ElderCare.acl.gov).

### **The Benefits of Planning Ahead**

Even if you do not expect a transition in the near future, it can be a good idea to visit facilities before a move is required. Starting early will allow you time to get to know the skilled nursing facilities in your area in case you need to make a quick decision. Keep in mind that your options may be dependent upon factors such as availability or finances.

## Is a Skilled Nursing Facility Right for You or Your Loved One?

Long-term care in a skilled nursing facility provides 24-hour assistance with advanced care needs. Staff assists with daily living activities and medication management. They also provide opportunities for social interactions and participating in recreational and wellness programs. Meals are offered in a group dining setting and housekeeping and laundry services are also included.

### Evaluating Long-term Care Skilled Nursing Facilities

You can find recommendations for skilled nursing facilities from local support groups or community organizations serving people with PD. You can also use the Medicare Nursing Home Compare tool at [Medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare](https://www.medicare.gov/NursingHomeCompare) or the Nursing Home Inspect Guide at [Projects.Propublica.org/Nursing-Homes](https://www.projects.propublica.org/nursing-homes).

Consider also reading online reviews of local facilities and visiting their website or social media pages. You can also call your local Area Agency on Aging for facility reviews at 1-800-667-1116 or visit [ElderCare.acl.gov](https://www.eldercare.acl.gov).

You can schedule a tour for skilled nursing facilities where you can gather information about their services, resources and costs. It is often helpful to take a family member, friend, or if financially feasible, an Aging Life Care Expert with you. You can find an Aging Life Care Expert in your area by calling 520-881-8008 or visiting [AgingLifeCare.org](https://www.aginglifecare.org).

### Questions to Ask a Potential Skilled Nursing Facility

Refer to the questions on the following pages for guidance. Try to make a second, unannounced visit in the evening or on a weekend. You may learn additional information that adds to your overall opinion of the facility. If you have specific questions about this process, contact our Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).

#### First Glance Considerations:

- Is the environment in good repair, clean and free of odors?
- Does the staff seem friendly and approachable?
- Can residents access outdoor spaces? Are the outdoor spaces well maintained?

#### Notes:

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**Care Questions:**

- What is the medication schedule? How can I be sure my loved one receives their Parkinson's medications on time, every time?
- What is the staff-to-resident ratio? Does this change during the overnight hours?
- Are there on-site rehabilitation services (physical, occupational and speech therapies) and counseling services? If not, does the facility contract with an outside provider or can I hire one?
- In the event of a medical emergency, can my loved one be taken to our preferred hospital?
- What kind of Parkinson's training does staff receive?
- How does the staff determine a care plan?

**Notes:**

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**Social & Wellness Opportunities:**

- What spiritual and/or religious services are offered to residents?
- In what ways are residents' lives enriched (music therapy, art therapy, animal therapy, etc.)? Can I see an activities calendar?
- What programs provide cognitive stimulation?
- What types of fitness classes and fitness equipment are available?

**Notes:**

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**Dining Questions:**

- Can I see a food menu? See the Nutrition fact sheet for more information on nutritional needs of people with PD at [Parkinson.org/Library](http://Parkinson.org/Library).
- Are there snacks available and are they easily accessible?
- How does the staff accommodate special dining needs (diet, eating assistance and adaptive devices)?
- If you are unable to eat in the dining room, is there a charge for in-room meal service?

**Notes:**

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**Financial Questions:**

- What are the monthly charges? Can I receive an itemized bill each month?
- Can additional services be added to your monthly bill without my permission?
- How often are grooming/salon services available on-site? What is the cost for a haircut, style, manicure, etc.?

**Notes:**

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## Considerations if Your Loved One Has Dementia

If your loved one needs more care due to dementia, you may need to look for a memory care environment.

Some skilled nursing facilities will have a dedicated "memory care" section with security features that keep residents with dementia from leaving without assistance. Memory care staff are often required to complete state-regulated dementia training. Many memory care wings also offer social and recreational programs designed for people in various stages of dementia.

Skilled nursing facilities serve residents with dementia in both the general and memory care wings, but the goal is to look for the setting that will best support your loved one. If feasible, visit various types of facilities nearby. While touring a non-memory care specific part of the building, try to gauge whether your loved one will receive the necessary support. For safety or interpersonal reasons, they may be supported more adequately in a memory care setting.

### Memory Care Questions:

- What dementia training does staff receive? How are they coached to communicate effectively and support the behavioral symptoms of dementia? How is staff required to keep their training current?
- How are the social and recreational programs adapted for people in various stages of dementia? What recreational programs can staff recommend for my loved one?
- How is the building or layout of the memory care community tailored to be supportive to people with dementia? How is exiting the building without staff or family assistance prevented?
- How does staff learn about residents' likes, dislikes, and interests? How is this information utilized to inform the care plan?

### Notes:

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For more information or reference to local services, call the Parkinson's Foundation Helpline at 1-800-4PD-INFO (473-4636).