



DementiaUK
Helping families face dementia

Considering a care home for a person with dementia



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Dementia is a complex, progressive condition, which means caring for someone with the diagnosis often becomes increasingly difficult as time passes. There may come a point when you can no longer look after the person at home, or when moving into a care home is in their best interests, as well as your own and other family carers’.

Types of care home

There are two main types of care home:

- Residential care homes provide accommodation and personal care such as help with washing, dressing, giving medication, using the toilet and taking part in activities. Some specialise in dementia care
- Nursing homes also provide personal care, but have qualified nursing staff who can support people with more complex physical or mental health needs

Some homes offer both residential and nursing care.

The person’s needs will influence the type of care home you choose. Some people move from a residential care home to a nursing home as their needs become more complex.

When might you consider a care home?

If you are finding it difficult to meet the needs of the person with dementia or keep them safe, or if caring is affecting your physical or mental health, moving into a care home may be the best decision for them and you. Reasons for considering a care home might include:

- sleep problems, including sleeplessness or disturbed sleep throughout the night
- concerns about the person’s safety at home, for example difficulty using the stairs, cooking safely or having falls



- the person leaving the home alone and/or getting lost outside the home
- a breakdown or change in a home care arrangement
- difficulties for the carer in managing multiple responsibilities, such as caring for children or working
- difficulties managing personal care such as washing, dressing and continence
- frailty in the person with dementia and/or the person caring for them
- difficulty managing multiple health conditions in the person with dementia and/or the person caring for them
- worries about the safety of yourself and others, for example if the person with dementia becomes agitated when distressed

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- the person being reluctant to accept your help
- the person finding it increasingly difficult to cope with daily living, eg neglecting their home and/or themselves
- the person feeling anxious and unsettled in their own home and/or not recognising that they are at home

When considering whether the person with dementia should move into a care home, try to involve the person themselves and other family members, especially others who have caring responsibilities. Our dementia specialist Admiral Nurses can also offer advice and support – please see Sources of support on p16 for information.

Capacity to make decisions

Over time, the person with dementia may lose the mental capacity to make decisions about their own care – including whether it is right for them to move into a care home. To have capacity, they must be able to:

- understand the information relevant to the decision
- retain the information
- use that information as part of their decision-making process
- communicate that decision to others, even if not verbally

If possible, try to establish the person's wishes for long-term care in advance, while they still have capacity. This will help you respect and advocate for their preferences if they become unable to make decisions. To ensure this happens, they should make:

An advance care plan: a document setting out the person's wishes for their future medical and personal care, including residential care. This will help you plan ahead and avoid having to make significant care decisions in a crisis situation.



Lasting power of attorney (LPA): a legal process where a person appoints someone they trust (known as their ‘attorney’) to make decisions on their behalf if they lack capacity. There are two types of LPA:

- health and welfare
- property and financial affairs

The health and welfare LPA allows the person’s attorney to make decisions about them moving into a care home (as well as their medical care and whether they should receive life-sustaining treatment like resuscitation).

LPAs apply in England and Wales. In Scotland, the equivalent is called power of attorney (PoA). In Northern Ireland, it is called enduring power of attorney (EPA), but this only covers financial matters; there is no power of attorney for health and welfare.

Regardless of whether the person with dementia has made a power of attorney and/or advance care plan, they should be consulted and involved in decisions about their care wherever possible. If this is no longer possible and you need to decide if the person should move into a care home, a ‘best interests’ decision-making process should be followed, in consultation with other people who are involved in their care – for example, family members and health and social care professionals.

For more information on capacity, advance care planning (including our template) and power of attorney, please see Sources of support on p16-17.

Assessments of care needs

There are certain assessments that can establish the care needs of the person with dementia and their eligibility for financial support.

Care needs assessment: if you are unsure whether residential care is right for the person with dementia, you can request a Social Services care needs assessment. A trained assessor will assess the person’s care needs, face-to-face or by phone. They will then produce a report on their recommendations, which may advise moving to a care home. They will not recommend a particular care home but can give you a list of options in your area.

It may be helpful for the assessor to introduce the idea of moving to a care home to the person with dementia and other family members. Sometimes, people find it easier to accept advice from a professional rather than a relative.

Financial assessment: if the care needs assessment recommends the person receives care and support, which may include moving to a care home, they may qualify for financial assistance. Social Services will need to carry out an assessment of their finances. If



possible, this should take place before you start looking for care homes, as it might influence your decision – for example, some may be over your budget.

Financial assessments can be complicated, so do not hesitate to ask the assessor to clarify the process and explain the outcome.

Financial support is means-tested, so people who have savings and other assets (such as property) above a certain threshold will not qualify for assistance.

Please see Sources of support on p17–18 for more information on care needs assessments and financial assessments.

NHS continuing healthcare funding: this is a package of care that is fully funded by the NHS in England and Wales. It is for adults with long-term, complex health needs, which may include dementia. Normal NHS healthcare is free, but continuing healthcare covers other costs, such as home carers or care home fees.

There are two stages to the application process. The first is the 'checklist', which looks at certain criteria to see if the person is eligible for a full assessment. The second is a full assessment which considers each area in depth, with the assessor deciding if the person qualifies for continuing healthcare.

Applying for continuing healthcare can be difficult and stressful, so it is highly recommended that you have the support of a dementia specialist. You can speak to an Admiral Nurse for guidance and support, but please be aware that we cannot help with individual applications or assessments. Our Helpline may be able to direct you to other local services that could help, or you could ask your GP or social worker about organisations that can support you.

Please see Sources of support on p16 for information on continuing healthcare and how to speak to an Admiral Nurse.

Choosing the right care home for a person with dementia

Choosing a care home can be challenging. Some might be too expensive. Some might be full, or unable to cater for the person's individual needs. In some cases, there may not be a suitable care home in your area, and the person might be offered a placement in a home that is some distance from you, making it hard to visit regularly.

It can be particularly difficult to find a suitable care home for a person with young onset dementia (where symptoms develop before the age of 65). Many are tailored to older people and cannot support the different physical and mental health and social needs of a younger person. Alongside the advice in this leaflet, we have produced a leaflet specifically to help you choose a care home for a person with young onset dementia – please see Sources of support on p16.

Every care home is different, so it is important to research and visit several options. Preparing some questions and a checklist of your requirements and wishes may be helpful during your visits. You can also ask friends, family and other local people – such as members of carers’ support groups – if they have any recommendations or insights.

As well as visiting homes, take time to find out about the quality of care. All care homes are inspected by independent regulators who rate them based on residents’ quality of life and the care delivered. Care homes are inspected by:

- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) in England
- The Care Inspectorate in Wales
- The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) in Northern Ireland
- The Care Inspectorate in Scotland

You can find care homes’ inspection reports online (see Sources of support on p17) or ask the home for a copy when you visit.

Try to involve the person with dementia and the wider family in choosing a care home. This will allow everyone to share their views and minimise disagreements.

What makes a good care home?

Every family has its own needs and preferences when choosing a care home, but a warm welcome, homely atmosphere, and residents and staff who seem content are good indications of a positive environment. You can find out a lot by talking to residents, relatives and staff.

It is also important to use your senses: how does it smell? Is it warm enough? Is it noisy? Is it light and well maintained?

You might want to consider:

- Do staff have specific dementia knowledge and training?
- Does the care home tailor activities to residents' individual interests?
- Are there opportunities for the person to continue with their current hobbies and interests?
- Are residents involved in daily activities and routines, eg helping to prepare food, lay tables, gardening?
- Is there access to books, board games, radio, TV, puzzles, a piano etc?
- What is the food like? Can the home cater for special diets?
- Is there secure access to outside space and fresh air?
- Is there a choice of social and communal areas – eg a quiet space to sit and rest, and a livelier area for activities and conversations?
- Is there regular access to healthcare and wellbeing support, including doctors, dentists, podiatrists and hairdressers?
- What is the staff turnover rate?
- What are the visiting times? Are they flexible?
- If children will be visiting a parent or other relative, will they feel welcome and comfortable?
- Can you have a meal with the person with dementia by prior arrangement?



- How accessible is the home for the people who are most likely to visit?
- What residents' and relatives' groups are there?
- How are residents and their families involved in care decisions?
- How are residents with communication difficulties supported?
- What are the laundry arrangements?
- Does the home arrange special events such as daytrips, visits from local schools, film nights, themed activities etc?
- Are there links to the local community – for instance, can residents get their newspapers delivered? Go to a place of worship? Go to the Post Office?

- Does the care home offer transport for outings?
- How easily can you communicate with staff if you have questions, concerns or suggestions?
- How will staff support you and the person with dementia as they approach the end of life?

A compassionate, skilled team with supportive leadership is vital to a good home. Talk to the staff and manager about how they provide care, what training the staff undertake, and how they make a difference to the residents. If the manager is new, you could ask about their vision for the future of the home.

The impact of moving into a care home

Moving into a care home is a major transition for the person with dementia. They may feel the loss of independence, and miss their family, home and normal routines. But although the move can be distressing, it will often lead to improvements in health and quality of life for you both, and more opportunities for socialising and meaningful activities for the person with dementia and those who care for them.

The support of family, friends, professionals and the care home itself is essential during this transition. To ease the process, it may be possible for the person to have an overnight or short respite stay prior to moving in. Make sure they also have familiar items around them, such as their own bedding, photos and ornaments. They may even be able to take in their favourite chair or other small pieces of furniture.

How you can help

You can play an important part in helping the person settle into the care home and have a positive experience of living there.



Building positive relationships

- Think of the care home as an ‘extended family’ around you and the person with dementia; this can frame the transition in a positive way
- Get to know the staff by name and help them get to know you too. This includes the wider team, including cleaners, gardeners and kitchen staff – everyone can contribute to an overall positive experience
- Share your knowledge about the person with dementia so staff can understand and support them better. You could do this by creating and sharing the person’s life story – a record of their past and present life, likes, dislikes, values etc. Small details are important, like how they take their tea, their favourite radio

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station and what sports team they support. Please see Sources of support on p16

- Be clear with staff about the person's needs – everyone is unique
- Ensure staff know how the person usually responds to being distressed and how they can support them. What gives them physical and emotional comfort?
- Try to spend quality time with the person, taking part in meaningful activities that you both enjoy – like listening to music, dancing, sharing tea and cake, reading the newspaper, doing a jigsaw, watching a film
- If you are struggling to connect with the person, particularly if their ability to communicate changes, talk to staff about other ways to maintain your relationship, for example looking at photos or giving them a gentle hand massage

Working with staff

- Thank staff when you see good examples of care. You can also tell the manager, as this feedback can be useful in staff appraisals
- Ask for regular review meetings and look for solutions together if issues arise. Keep conversations open and share your ideas
- Get to know the home's routines – for example, find out the best time to visit, whether you could offer support at mealtimes, if you can be involved in group activities etc
- Ask to be involved with the person's care planning (establishing and meeting the person's care needs in the present) and advance care planning (planning for the future) – see Sources of support on p16

- Consider if you could offer support with activities – for example, if you play an instrument, could you lead a music session? If you enjoy gardening, could you start a residents’ gardening group?
- Think about joining the home’s relatives’ and residents’ group to support the care home more generally

Your emotions

Moving the person with dementia into a care home can be a very emotional experience. You may feel you are letting them down, especially if – like many people – you promised that they would never have to go into a home. You may feel a sense of loss and grief if your caring role changes or if you are now living alone. You may feel guilty for considering your own needs when deciding to move the person into a care home, and worry that other family members and friends will judge you for not being able to continue in your caring role.

However, supporting a person with dementia can be emotionally and physically exhausting, so it is important to look after yourself. You cannot care for someone else if your own health is suffering.

While it is natural to feel guilty, moving a person with dementia into a care home is often a positive step, allowing them to receive expert care tailored to their needs. And when you are no longer absorbed in the daily duties of caring, you can focus on enjoying the time you spend together.

Please see Sources of support on p16-17 for our information on grief, guilt and looking after yourself as a carer. You can also speak to our Admiral Nurses for support.

Sources of support

If you are living with dementia or caring for someone with the condition, register for our free online sessions, ‘Dementia: what next?’ at [▶ dementiauk.org/dementia-what-next](https://dementiauk.org/dementia-what-next)

To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse, call our free Helpline on **0800 888 6678** (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday and Sunday 9am-5pm, every day except 25th December) or email [▶ helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

If you prefer, you can book a phone or video call with an Admiral Nurse at a time to suit you: please visit [▶ dementiauk.org/book](https://dementiauk.org/book)

Dementia UK resources

Advance care planning (including a template)

[▶ dementiauk.org/advance-care-planning](https://dementiauk.org/advance-care-planning)

Choosing a care home for a person with young onset dementia

[▶ dementiauk.org/young-onset-dementia-choosing-a-care-home](https://dementiauk.org/young-onset-dementia-choosing-a-care-home)

Creating a life story (including a template)

[▶ dementiauk.org/life-story](https://dementiauk.org/life-story)

Coping with feelings of guilt

[▶ dementiauk.org/coping-with-feelings-of-guilt](https://dementiauk.org/coping-with-feelings-of-guilt)

Grief, bereavement and loss

[▶ dementiauk.org/bereavement](https://dementiauk.org/bereavement)

Guide to NHS continuing healthcare funding

[▶ dementiauk.org/guide-to-continuing-healthcare-funding](https://dementiauk.org/guide-to-continuing-healthcare-funding)

Lasting power of attorney

➤ dementiauk.org/lasting-power

Looking after yourself as a carer

➤ dementiauk.org/looking-after-yourself-when-you-care

Mental capacity and decision-making

➤ dementiauk.org/capacity-decision-making

Care home inspectorates

The Care Quality Commission (England)

➤ cqc.org.uk

The Care Inspectorate (Wales)

➤ careinspectorate.wales

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (Northern Ireland)

➤ rqia.org.uk

The Care Inspectorate (Scotland)

➤ careinspectorate.com

Other resources

Assessment of care needs (Scotland)

➤ mygov.scot/care-rights

carehome.co.uk – care home directory and reviews

➤ carehome.co.uk

Care Rights UK – support for people having issues with care

➤ carerightsuk.org

Enduring power of attorney (Northern Ireland)

➤ nidirect.gov.uk/articles/managing-your-affairs-and-enduring-power-attorney

Financial assessments (means test) for social care

➤ nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/financial-assessment-means-test

Health and social care assessments (Northern Ireland)

➤ nidirect.gov.uk/articles/arranging-health-and-social-care

Make, register or amend a lasting power of attorney (England and Wales)

➤ gov.uk/power-of-attorney

My Home Life – supporting quality of life in care homes

➤ myhomelife.org.uk

The needs assessment (England and Wales)

➤ nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/help-from-social-services-and-charities/getting-a-needs-assessment

Paying for your own care (self-funding)

➤ nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/money-work-and-benefits/paying-for-your-own-care-self-funding

Power of attorney (Scotland)

➤ mygov.scot/power-of-attorney



To speak to a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse about any aspect of dementia:

Contact our Helpline:

0800 888 6678 or [▶ helpline@dementiauk.org](mailto:helpline@dementiauk.org)

Book a virtual appointment:

[▶ dementiauk.org/book](https://dementiauk.org/book)

Our charity relies entirely on donations to fund our life-changing work. If you would like to donate to help us support more families:

- Call **0300 365 5500**
- Visit [▶ dementiauk.org/donate](https://dementiauk.org/donate)
- Scan the QR code



Thank you.



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