



## Learn about Senior Living

Growing old in our society, it's not an easy thing to talk about, let alone think about. Fortunately, there are many choices today, about lifestyle and care, that can add quality to life like never before. With some basic awareness and planning, it is very possible for seniors to live the kind of lives they want to live. The time to think about and plan for those years is now. The information found in "Learn about Senior Living" can help get the process started.

### **Seniors and Aging – Overview**

Planning for senior living involves all kinds of rational decision making. It also involves a lot of emotional letting go. No two people face their own aging in quite the same way. Plus, some people age faster than others, or in different ways. And no two families are the same either. Economics, belief systems and living situations vary greatly. What works for one family is impossible for the next.

It is good to realize that your family is not alone. In the US, over 12 million Americans are making senior living decisions right now. That number increases every year. In fact, by 2030, over 65 million Americans will be facing retirement and senior living decisions.

So consider yourself on the leading edge of a new trend. And give yourself a break; there is no such thing as the "typical situation". Everyone, every family has a unique set of circumstances that must be weighed. The worst thing to do is to compare and judge your family's decisions based on what other people think.

## **The Right Time For Care**

When is the right time to consider a senior living arrangement? Again, it all depends. Knowing how to recognize the right time comes down to the kind of living arrangement needed. Some seniors choose to stay home. Others require some kind of specific care. While others consider senior living solely on their changing lifestyle, such as escaping the upkeep of a house, or being with others who have similar interests. Once you recognize your circumstance, it is easier to assess the options.

## **Communication is the Key**

*"They'll never get me into a home."* or *"Who is going to take care of me when I grow old?"* All too many families know the fear and drama behind conversations like these. That's because making senior living decisions is *hard*. It represents an enormous change for everyone involved. How do you face leaving your family home? How do you suggest to a parent or loved one they may be better off "somewhere else?" How do you balance love and necessity?

The only way to work through the feelings of fear, uncertainty, and guilt is to talk about it. This can also be hard, but it is far better than to avoid the conversation. Once it's clear you are acting out of love and consideration –out of what's best for everyone – the dialogue may start to get easier.

Any decision about senior living, whether it's a senior thinking about moving or an adult child considering help for a parent, should include the entire family.

These conversations require a leader or organizer (the one who starts the dialogue) and usually the person who most favors the change should be appointed. It's best when everything is "put on the table": support, finances, timing, and choices.

## **Start with the Basics**

*First Consideration: Geographics.* This could vary based on weather, a dream location, or closeness to special relative.

*Second Consideration: Services and Needs.* Do you need someone to cook meals? Administer medication? Help with dressing and bathing? Or just a more social lifestyle?

*Third Consideration: Financial.* What can you afford? This can be a huge question, as you have to consider things like retirement savings, your estate, outside assistance and other family financial needs.

*Forth and Final Consideration: Comfort.* Just what feels like home? Within the spectrum of senior living, there is a lifestyle for every taste. At the end of the day, home is what we make it.

## **What is Independent Living?**

They are for seniors who want to enjoy the benefits of an active, independent lifestyle. Sometimes called retirement communities, these places provide the best of both worlds: private living along with communal services and activities. Independent living attracts people who are looking to trade the responsibility of home maintenance, in exchange for a range of social, educational, and leisure activities.

Independent Living is all about lifestyle. Communities are often designed as private campuses. Many feature pools, spas, exercise centers, and social halls. Meal plans and organized activities are also common. Some communities offer varying forms of health care; but often, residents are accountable for their own well being.

## **What is Assisted Living?**

Assisted Living is probably the most broadly defined form of senior living available today. With changes in medical and health technology and evolving attitudes about aging, assisted living solutions become more popular every year.

The Assisted Living Federation of America (ALFA) defines an assisted living residence as a special combination of housing, personalized supportive services and healthcare designed to meet the needs both scheduled and non-scheduled of those seniors who need help with activities of daily living (ADLs), such as bathing, dressing, eating, and monitoring medications.

The average assisted living resident is 83 years old and requires assistance with 2 ADLs. It offers residents with many of the same benefits as Independent Living, while providing basic help in areas that may have become personally challenging.

## **What is Alzheimer's Care?**

Alzheimer's care is a progressive, degenerative brain disease that results in impaired memory, thinking, and behavior. It is most common form of dementia in seniors, with causes and cure that remain unknown. It touches everyone involved; many with Alzheimer's require around-the-clock assistance with the most basic daily activities.

Today, assisted living and nursing communities are making Alzheimer's care a core part of their services. Many facilities offer flexible programs based on resident's needs and life skills. The priority is to provide a secure and peaceful environment. Dignity, respect, support, and understanding are the keys to the most effective forms of outside help.

- 4 Million Americans have Alzheimer's today.
- Over 14 Million Americans will have the disease by 2050 unless a cure is found.

- Almost 1 in 10 people over the age of 65, and nearly half of those over 85 have Alzheimer's disease.

### **What is Nursing Care?**

Nursing care is the most established and most recognized of all forms of senior care. Generally speaking, Nursing Care Facilities are living communities for seniors who require constant, or 24-Hour supervisory nursing care. The most obvious feature of a Nursing Care community is the around-the-clock presence and influence of nurses; registered nurses, licensed-practical nurses and certified nursing assistants.

In addition to expert care, most nursing facilities offer many of the same services and day-to-day amenities as Assisted Living Communities. Within the context of the individual senior's specific care needs, residents participate in planned activities and social events. Facilities usually include dining rooms and social areas.

Some communities may also offer individual or family counseling, physical and respiration therapies, post-hospital and surgical care, restorative care and coordination of care services.

### **What are Short-Term Stays or Respite Care?**

Sometimes a caregiver is the one who needs temporary assistance. For example, a much needed family vacation, or out-of-town business trip that may not have been feasible, can now be accommodated, thanks to this unique, but growing service. Respite care is typically designed for stays of a week to several months.

Respite care programs are often available at senior living communities. "Visiting" seniors are welcomed into the community and included in all activities. Often the senior enjoys the experience and decides to move in permanently. Services to expect are:

- Furnished, private apartments
- Full meal plan
- Personal care assistance

- Daily activities and social events
- Housekeeping
- Transportation to local venues

## **What is Hospice Care?**

Hospice care is a holistic and compassionate approach to the end-of-life with the emphasis on caring, not curing. It involves symptom management, emotional, and spiritual support. Care is tailored to the resident's needs and wishes, while providing support for family members and loved ones in the process.

Today, many senior care communities offer the option of hospice care services. Often, the community will contract with preferred outside professionals. Hospice care services include:

- Resident and family member education and counseling
- On-site, professional care teams
- Medical supplies, equipment, medication, and therapies
- Bereavement counseling
- Support Groups