

A photograph of a woman and a man riding bicycles outdoors. The woman is in the foreground, smiling and looking to the side. She is wearing a brown cardigan and pink pants. The man is in the background, also smiling, wearing a light blue shirt. They are riding on a path with a body of water and hills in the background.

A Guide To

FINDING A *safe* & COMFORTABLE

Living Community

THE
ARBOR
COMPANY
SUPERIOR SENIOR LIVING



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There's nothing wrong with doing something on the fly, like booking a hotel for a last-minute weekend getaway, when the stakes are low—after all, most of us can put up with a lumpy mattress or a noisy neighbor if it's only for a two-day stint. However, it doesn't pay to cut corners when researching something as important as senior living, which could have ramifications for years to come. Thoroughly investigating the options before signing a contract can avert the pain of having to live in a place that doesn't feel like home or having to uproot.



WHY IS *comfort* SO IMPORTANT FOR A SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY?

Whether you are nestled in an apartment surrounded by much-loved belongings, playing cards in a cozy living room or planting tulips in the garden, feeling content in your own home is a basic human need. So is feeling like you are part of a bigger community. Because senior living provides both a home as well as a community, it can have a huge impact on your emotional health and well-being.



WHERE TO *start*

The Internet and a simple Google search are excellent resources when you just begin searching for the right community. Most websites will provide information such as location, amenities, care options and entertainment details like activities or nearby attractions. Aside from the community's website, read online reviews in order to get a sense of the quality of care and staff.

Although print brochures, virtual tours and online marketing materials are great in order to help narrow the search, nothing can beat checking out a community in person. Go on a scheduled tour with a community representative who can answer all your questions, but also pop in at other times, perhaps during a group activity or at mealtimes so that you can see firsthand how staff and residents interact.

Don't forget to ask a relative or two to go along with you—you can benefit by hearing their impressions. If you are serious about a senior living community but a little unsure, see if you can book a temporary stay—it will go a long way toward helping you make up your mind.



WHAT TO *look* FOR

When taking a tour of a potential community, there are several general things to evaluate by simply looking around and asking the right questions. By beginning the tour with direction on what to look for and inquire about, you can ensure that the community you or a loved one will call home is as comfortable as possible.





STAFF

For most, being surrounded by staff members who are kind, sociable and caring would trump living in a swanky environment any day. So, right from the start, observe how you are greeted by the receptionist and take note of how the staff members engage with residents. Do they come across as curt, cold or dismissive, or are they friendly, nurturing and patient in the main? Also, be sure to ask about the staff-to-resident ratio—even the most caring workers may have little time for social interaction if they are running in all directions in order to meet the needs of more residents than they can handle.

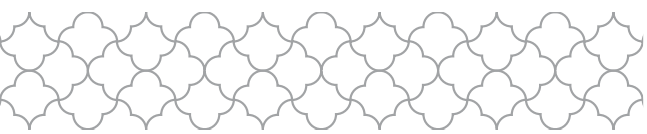
LEADERSHIP

Typically, it's a good sign if the community leadership staff—managers and the directors—return phone calls promptly and courteously and answer all your questions. Ask to meet the executive director and the resident care director on your tour and then take note of how they greet you and whether or not they reach out to residents who come across their path.

CURRENT RESIDENTS

Dropping in at a residence several times should give you a general idea of the community's social atmosphere. Are residents out and about, talking and laughing with each other, or are you left with the impression that people pretty much keep to themselves or sit around sleeping all day? If you feel comfortable, strike up a conversation with a resident or two for insight on the community. Since mealtime is a great opportunity for candid conversation, another option could be to ask if you can join some residents at their table for lunch or dinner.

Keep in mind, though, that as people give their opinions, they are bound to also talk about what they find wrong with the community. But this isn't necessarily a deal breaker. It's only natural that people will like some parts of their home while they don't like other parts. It will be up to you to weigh the good comments against the critical to form your overall impression of the community.



AMENITIES

Some senior living arrangements, such as residential care facilities, don't offer much in the way of amenities. This is not the case with assisted living communities. In addition to housekeeping and laundry services, these communities typically offer everything from wellness centers and gyms to chapels, hair salons and concierge services. They also usually provide plenty of common spaces, such as living rooms, libraries, business and Internet centers and clubhouses.

SURROUNDINGS & ENVIRONMENT

There is no one type of senior living community—the design, ambience and atmosphere of each one varies, ranging from high-rise apartments in the middle of a bustling downtown to campus communities surrounded by trees and greenery. As you begin your tour of the community, ask yourself if the setting appeals to you. If being outdoors is important, make sure there are plenty of gardens and patios as well as places in which to sit in the sun, stroll around or even do some gardening.

When you go inside, what is your general impression of the building itself? Do you find the decor attractive and homey, or does it have an institutional feel? You may run across some communities that almost resemble a vacation resort—keep in mind the fanciest places are not necessarily the best communities. What is most important is that the building is clean and fresh smelling and in good repair.

Also, check that there is good natural and artificial lighting. Sunlight does the mind and body wonders! And listen around in order to ensure that the noise levels are tolerable.

Although you should thoroughly check out the dining hall, the living rooms and other common areas, pay particular attention to the model apartment you are shown.

This quick checklist will help you examine the space for comfortable, private living:

Can you imagine your furniture in it?

Do the suites come with a kitchenette or at least a microwave and a mini-fridge?

Is there adequate storage space?

Do all apartments come with a telephone, cable or satellite TV and Wi-Fi?

Do you like the decor?



ACTIVITIES AND ENTERTAINMENT

No senior living community will make you participate in an activity if you don't want to, but do recognize that taking part is often the quickest way to feel more at home. With that in mind, look at the community's events calendar in order to see if the community's events appeal to you. It's usually a good sign if the community offers a diverse range of activities, including ones geared to small interest groups (think bird-watching, book or knitting clubs) as well as larger, more inclusive events like garden parties or holiday celebrations. Also, check to see if there are scheduled outings for trips to museums and the like. On the tour, you may be able to speak to the activity director in order to find out if the preferences of residents are taken into account when developing the calendar. The best communities interview new residents and families to learn what they like to do as well as what they used to like to do. These interviews are used to build community activity calendars so that there will be activities of interest for everyone.





ADDITIONAL *questions* TO ASK ABOUT

While the above are certainly things that you can observe on a tour, the following items are also important and may be questions to ask staff throughout the tour.



FOOD AND NUTRITION

Large senior living communities typically hire chefs and dietitians in order to ensure that meals are delicious as well as nutritious. Find out firsthand how good the food is by sampling a meal if possible and look at a monthly or weekly menu in order to see which meal options are typically offered. Determine if residents ever help out with menu planning and if there are à la carte options. If you have a special diet, make sure that the kitchen can accommodate your requests.

FREEDOM TO DECORATE & REARRANGE

For many people transitioning to senior living, the prerogative to decorate and personalize their own living quarters is high on their list of priorities. After all, the way you arrange your living space reflects your own personal style. Furthermore, artwork, photographs and furniture are more than just objects—they contain memories. So, before you sign a contract for any senior living community, make sure you can bring your own belongings if this is important to you. This shouldn't be a problem with most, if not all, assisted living communities; however, residential care facilities may have restrictions on the number of personal items you can bring.

VISITATION

Before a final decision is made on a particular community, establish that friends and family can visit whenever they like (within reason) and join a meal in the dining room, if desired. It's a bonus if the community has a separate dining room that you can book for special occasions like birthdays. It's also a plus if the community will allow the convenience and space for a visiting grandchild or other loved one to spend the night in the apartment from time to time.

Here are a few more questions to ask:

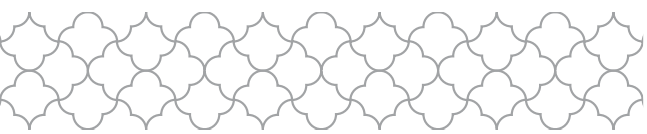
When are mealtimes scheduled?
Is there any flexibility around these times?

What if I don't like what is on the menu? Do I have other options beyond something simple like chicken fingers?

Are seats assigned in the dining room, or is it free seating?

Can meals be eaten in private rooms or in other locations (for example, in a café)?

Are snacks available?



OPTIONS FOR PETS

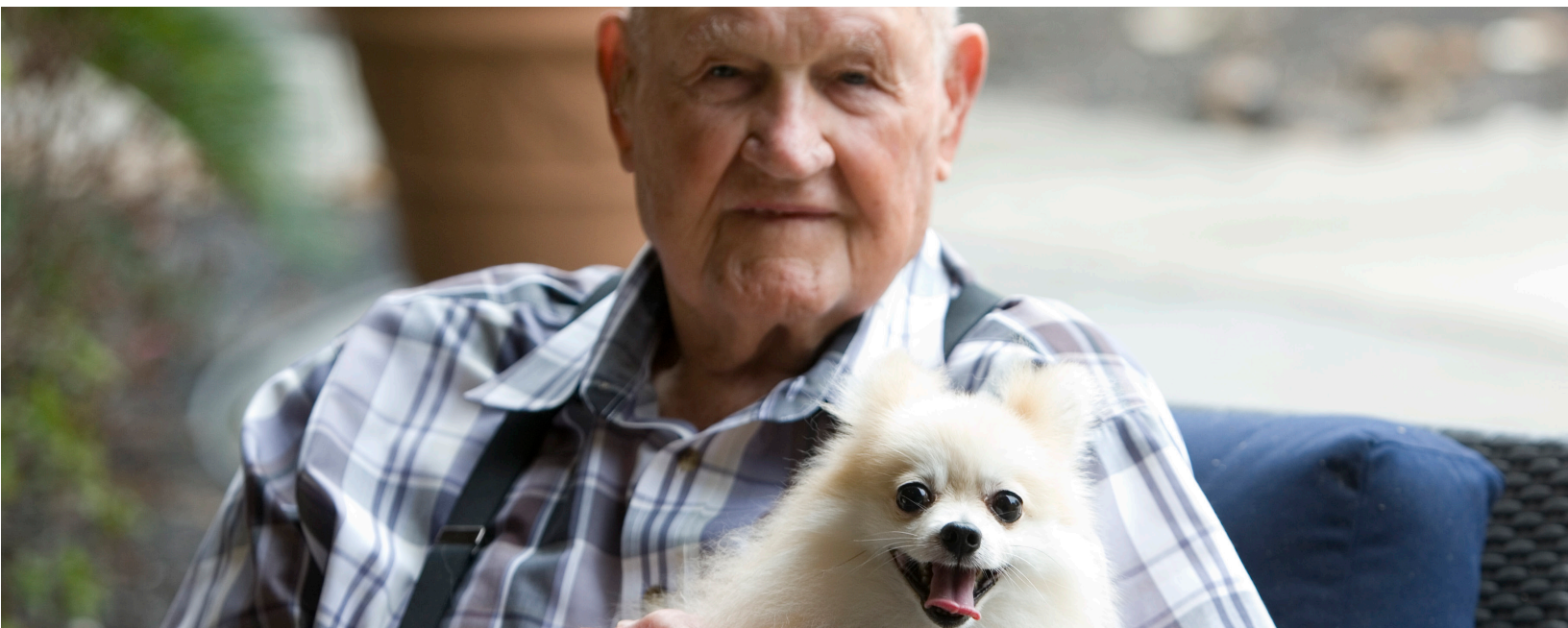
If bringing the family tabby or hound is a must, make a point to enquire about pet policies. Some communities will allow pets, some won't, and others have restrictions on their number or size. If a community is pet-friendly, find out if it offers grooming and dog walking services as well as a pet coordinator who can help residents provide pet care if necessary. Take note that some "no pets" communities do have a resident dog or cat. Some may even have a pet therapy program that allows seniors to interact on a regular basis with a therapy pet (usually a dog).

TRANSPORTATION

If you still drive, confirm that the senior living community has a parking area for residents. If you no longer drive, it can make life easier and more enjoyable if the community provides scheduled transportation to doctor or hairdressing appointments as well as shopping or other activities.

ON-SITE REHABILITATION

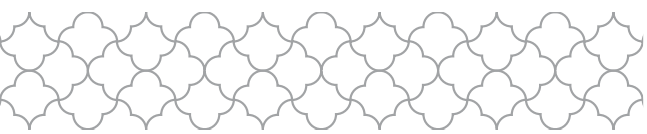
Whether it is a recurring injury or the aches and pains of arthritis, on-site therapeutic options like massage, physical or occupational therapy or pool therapy can be convenient for rehab. As well, investigate if the community offers group exercise programs, such as tai chi, yoga or Pilates (including seated versions for those with mobility concerns) that work to increase flexibility, balance and strength.



WHAT MAKES A *safe* SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY?

In addition to feeling comfortable, it's paramount that the community where we rest at night is secure and safe. We've all heard the horror stories; how can you be sure a community is safe?





FROM THE STAFF

In addition to having great people skills, it's crucial that staff members are highly skilled and have received training on such topics as elder abuse and neglect as well as emergency response training. You should also find out if the community conducts criminal background checks on employees and try to ascertain the turnover rate.

FROM THE CAREGIVERS

One way to get the inside scoop is by talking with friends and acquaintances whose parents reside in a particular community. Do these caregivers have any safety concerns about the residence? Check with the Better Business Bureau in order to see if any families have lodged a complaint against communities that you are considering and do an online search in order to see if there are any news stories or reviews that raise red flags. (While on the Internet, check with your state to make sure that the residence is licensed and in compliance with local regulations.)

FROM THE FOOD

It may be tempting to focus solely on the taste and nutritional value of the food. But in addition to eating great tasting, healthy meals, you need to feel reasonably sure that you won't develop food poisoning. Although it may feel awkward, consider asking if you can drop in (unannounced) in order to inspect the kitchen and dining areas.

Questions to ask yourself include:

Does the kitchen appear clean and organized?

Is there a separate sink for staff members to wash their hands in?

Do kitchen staff members wear hairnets and plastic gloves?

Have the staff members taken the necessary food-handling courses?

When was the last time the city or county inspected the food service areas and what was the score?



FROM THE BUILDING

When you first step into the building, look for a staffed reception area where visitors are asked to sign in and out. Nighttime access to the building should be by telephone or key card, and residents should be able to lock their apartment doors. Also, make sure that suites are equipped with easy-to-use 24-hour emergency response systems and that windows come with safety locks.

When it comes to fire prevention, smoke alarms and fire sprinklers are a must, exits should be clearly marked and fire drills should take place on a regular basis.

In addition, enquire if the residence has an emergency generator or alternative power source should need arise.

Because falling is a leading cause of disability in seniors, you should look for a senior living community that has taken steps in order to prevent falls.

Questions regarding this include:

Are hallways free of obstacles and equipped with handrails?

Are public areas well lit?

Do chairs have armrests so that residents can easily rise from sitting to standing?

Are carpets secure (throw rugs can be a hazard!), and do they allow for the easy movement of walkers and canes?



WHICH SPECIFIC *care* NEEDS TO CONSIDER

If you or your loved one has a special medical condition, you need to determine if the community can provide the support required. Some specific considerations are outlined below.





DISABILITY, SPECIAL NEEDS, OR UNIQUE MEDICAL CARE

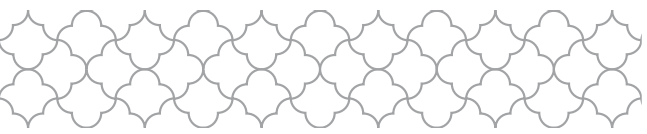
If a physical disability is present, it's key that you choose a community that meets the universal design and Americans with Disabilities Act standards for accessible design. Here are some features that signal the community is in compliance:

- ✓ Elevators
- ✓ Doorways and hallways that are wide enough to accommodate walkers and wheelchairs
- ✓ Easy-to-reach cupboards and shelves
- ✓ Bathrooms that are fitted with grab bars and shower stools
- ✓ Help for the visually impaired (if you have impaired vision, you'll want to find out if staff members have been trained in order to meet the needs of residents with low vision or complete vision loss)

ASSISTED LIVING

If you need help with any of the Activities of Daily Living (eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring/walking and continence) it's vital that you find a community that provides the right amount of personal care assistance and medical care. To find out if the residence will meet your needs ask the following questions:

- ✓ Does the community provide medication management?
- ✓ Does a licensed nurse complete a comprehensive individualized assessment for each resident? If so, how often are assessments reviewed?
- ✓ How many nurses are on staff? Are they onsite or accessible 24 hours a day?
- ✓ Do geriatricians and other healthcare professionals, such as dentists or chiropractors, ever see clients on-site?



MEMORY CARE

Even if memory loss isn't an immediate concern, keep in mind that the incidence of dementia increases after the age of 65. Here are some questions to help be certain the community is equipped to deal with cognitive decline:

- ✓ Does the community have a separate memory care area?
- ✓ Are there secure exits and entrances that can only be opened with an electronic lock?
- ✓ Has staff undergone special dementia training? If so, how long was the training and what skills were they trained in?
- ✓ Does the community offer memory care residents special programming such as music or art therapies or tailored recreational programs?

OVERALL *evaluation*

Think closely about the type of lifestyle that will truly make one's senior years more enjoyable and stress-free. For instance, if meeting people, socializing and entertainment are of importance, a large assisted living community in a busy metropolis might be a great fit for you. Alternatively, if mobility is a big concern, finding a place where on-site service providers like a hair salon, dentist or massage clinic might be top of mind in the overall evaluation.

Although no one community may meet all of your or your loved one's desires, at least come up with a short list of must-haves versus nice-to-haves—and never look for housing based on cost alone. Sometimes a slightly higher price tag is worth it for a comfortable, carefree lifestyle that will allow healthy and active senior years.

Whatever the priorities, the senior living community you choose can have a huge impact on happiness, contentment, and even health for years to come. Finally, consider all the options and ask a lot of questions on the front end—it can make the difference in finding a senior living solution that's just right.



At The Arbor Company, we're dedicated to making senior living—whether it be assisted living, memory care or independent living—the absolute best it can be. And with more than 25 communities in 11 states, chances are there is an Arbor Senior Living Community near you.

FIND A COMMUNITY NEAR YOU

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