



# Home is Where the Help is

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How to find, hire and manage home care. This guide will assist you in setting up the ideal in-home care situation for your loved one.

**AgingCare.com**<sup>®</sup>

# Introduction

Maybe your husband just had hip surgery and is out of commission for the next few weeks while he heals. Perhaps your mother is having trouble managing her money or keeping up with the housework. In short, your loved one needs some extra care but they don't want to leave their home to receive it.

Professional home care providers can help fill in the gaps—whether by offering companionship, helping out around the house or attending to an ailing elder's medical needs—when a family member cannot take on the role of caregiver.

The following guide will assist you in setting up the ideal in-home care situation for your loved one by outlining the available options, providing you with tools and resources to help you select the right care provider and connecting you with different ways to pay for professional home care.

AgingCare.com sprouted from the desire to help people successfully navigate the landscape of being a family caregiver. We aim to nurture these compassionate men and women by connecting them with each other, as well as an ever-growing collection of online resources, both instructive and inspirational.

The creators of this guide: writer, Anne-Marie Botek; designer, Maria Breston; have gathered and presented the best of AgingCare.com, with the hope that it will enable people taking care of elderly loved ones to flourish and thrive on their path.

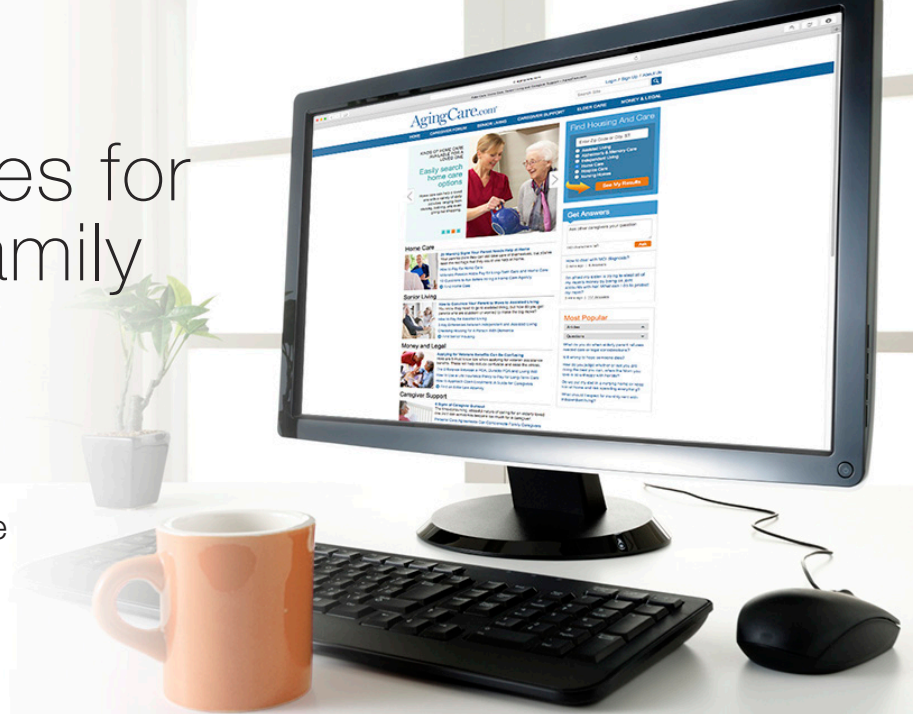
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# Helpful Resources for You and Your Family

Our goal is to provide families with the information and resources they need to care for their loved ones so they can enjoy their time together more and worry less. As an advocate for the family caregiver, all of our services are provided at no cost.



## Home Care Services

**FIND HOME CARE** [www.AgingCare.com/Find-Home-Care](http://www.AgingCare.com/Find-Home-Care)

Our Home Care Referral Program assists families in finding in-home care services. A care advisor will assess your needs and assist in arranging free in-home consultations with local agencies.

***Speak with a Care Advisor 1 (888) 495-8727***

## Senior Housing Services

**FIND SENIOR HOUSING** [www.AgingCare.com/Find-Senior-Housing](http://www.AgingCare.com/Find-Senior-Housing)

Senior housing includes Assisted Living, Independent Living and Memory Care Communities. Have a care advisor provide you with pricing information, availability and a list of services for communities in your area.

***Speak with a Care Advisor 1 (888) 848-5698***

## Support Groups

**VIEW ALL SUPPORT GROUPS** [www.AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum](http://www.AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum)

Get answers and support from other family caregivers and elder care experts in online Support Groups that address each of these topics:

[Alzheimer's & Dementia](#)

[Diabetes](#)

[New to Caregiving](#)

[Caregiver Burnout](#)

[Grief Support](#)

[Parkinson's Disease](#)

[Depression](#)

[Incontinence Care](#)

[Veterans Assistance](#)

## Funeral Services

**FREE PLANNING GUIDE** [www.AgingCare.com/Dignity](http://www.AgingCare.com/Dignity)

Download a funeral planning guide and locate funeral homes and cemeteries in your area to help you arrange the final tribute for your loved one or yourself.

**FIND A FUNERAL HOME** [www.AgingCare.com/local/Funeral-Homes](http://www.AgingCare.com/local/Funeral-Homes)

**FIND A CEMETERY** [www.AgingCare.com/local/Cemeteries](http://www.AgingCare.com/local/Cemeteries)

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## Chapter 1

# Stepping in When an Elder Needs Care

In this chapter, you will learn to recognize when an aging loved one needs additional help and how to persuade them to consider home care as an option.



# How to Recognize When a Loved One Needs Extra Help

**F**amily members of aging adults typically travel one of two paths to becoming a caregiver: the sudden sprint, or the gradual march. The sudden sprint towards providing care for a loved one is often set off by an unexpected event—a stroke, a fall, complications from surgery—which acts as a catalyst, escalating your family member’s care needs practically overnight.

The gradual march towards caregiving is less abrupt. You can’t say exactly when it began, but you’ve started noticing little changes in how your family member interacts with the world around them. Perhaps they’re getting lost while driving to the grocery store, or they are having trouble keeping track of their medications, or balancing their checkbook—tasks they’ve performed countless times over the years, without any problems.

Whether the change is sudden or gradual, there are certain signs you can look for that indicate when your loved one is having trouble attending to their own needs.

If your family member is consistently exhibiting the kinds of actions and behaviors outlined to the right, they may soon be in need of extra care.

Identifying the presence of these indicators early on will enable you, your aging loved one and the rest of your family to come up with a plan to make sure everyone’s needs are met.

Is your loved one exhibiting any of the concerning signs? AgingCare.com’s easy-to-use search tool is a great place to [begin your home care search](#).

## 22 Common Signs Your Loved One May Need Extra Help

### Physical

- Fluctuating weight
- Balance problems
- Poor hygiene
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Unexplained burns or bruises

### Home environment

- Unkempt yard
- Unusual carpet stains
- Excessive clutter (newspapers, piles of junk mail)
- Unusual odors (urine, garbage)
- Not enough food in the house
- Failure to turn off stove or water after use

### Emotional

- Mood swings
- Abusive behavior; outbursts
- Lack of motivation
- Uncharacteristically anti-social behavior

### Cognitive

- Confusion
- Memory loss
- Repetition
- Hallucinations

### Other

- Dents/scratches on the car
- Unfilled or untaken prescriptions
- Unpaid bills

# Getting a Loved One to Agree to Home Care

**A**s a family caregiver, your responsibility will be to make sure your loved one is safe, healthy and getting the care they need.

Many individuals express the desire to remain in their own home as they age, a wish that can be granted with the help of professional in-home care. But selling a senior on the idea that letting an outside caregiver—who is probably a stranger—into their home is hard.

Here are a few strategies to make this conversation a bit easier for everyone involved:

- 1. Put yourself in their shoes:** Aging adults often feel as though they are gradually losing control over their own life. With their freedom and independence seemingly hanging in the balance, a senior can start to feel hostile and resentful towards the well-meaning family members who are trying to help them. Be mindful of these feelings and try to approach the discussion of hiring an outside caregiver with sensitivity and empathy.
- 2. Choose the setting carefully:** Plan out in advance where you want the conversation to be held. Pick an area that is quiet and has few distractions (television, radio, too many people). Make sure you're facing your loved one at all times when talking.
- 3. Speak calmly and clearly:** Avoid raising your voice or shouting during a conversation; an argument can quickly escalate if either party starts acting flustered. When speaking to an older adult with hearing issues, keep your voice low and make sure to properly enunciate. This will ensure your loved one is literally hearing what you're saying.
- 4. Don't patronize:** No one likes being talked down to, especially if they've been living decades longer than the person they're conversing with. Even if you're talking to someone with Alzheimer's or some other form of dementia, don't infantilize them by employing the same manner and tone that you would use when speaking to a child.
- 5. Listen to what they are saying:** Make sure you're really listening to what your loved one is saying. Try not to interrupt or fill the silence during a conversation. When it's your turn to speak, summarize what you think your loved one has just said and then ask them for clarification, if necessary.

For an older adult, acknowledging that they are no longer capable of being completely autonomous will be difficult and full acceptance of this fact isn't likely to happen overnight. It's important to allow your loved one the time and space they need to come to terms with how their situation is changing. Once they do, it will be easier to persuade them to accept assistance from a professional caregiver.



## Chapter 2

# Understanding Professional Home Care

In this chapter, you will discover the basic categories of home care and learn about the different types of professional home care providers.





# The Basics of Home Care

Once it becomes clear that your elderly loved one requires additional help, you will be faced with several options for providing them the assistance they need. One option your family can turn to is in-home care provided by a professional caregiver.

There are many different types of home care, each of which has varying costs and may provide an elder with multiple levels of support. All home care services can be sorted into one of two categories:

- **Non-Medical Care:** The vast majority of in-home care is non-medical in nature and includes such services as companionship, housekeeping, meal preparation, transportation, shopping, money management, as well as assistance with activities of daily life (ADL)—bathing, eating, toileting, dressing and other personal care tasks. Non-medical care is typically provided by either a homemaker or a home health aide.
- **Medical Care:** Medical home care must be performed by a licensed medical professional (i.e. a certified nurse or a therapist). Dispensing medication, wound care, and physical or speech therapy all fall under the umbrella of medical home care services, and require a prescription from a doctor.

Your loved one may need only one type of care or a combination of both, depending on their health concerns and the availability of other family members to assist them with day-to-day activities.

## An agency or an independent caregiver?

Another key distinction in the home care universe is the difference between a licensed home care agency and an independent caregiver who contracts directly with a senior and their family.

In the United States, there are about 33,000 licensed home care and hospice providers that employ over two million nurses and aides. There are also an untold number of independent or “freelance” caregivers.

## 5 Myths of Home Care for the Elderly

1. **Professional caregivers don't really “care:”** Home health workers are trained to connect and engage with their elderly care recipients.
2. **Home care won't work for someone who needs 24/7 help:** Home care services can range from a few hours a week to round-the-clock care.
3. **There's no need to hire an outside caregiver if there's a family caregiver:** Professional helpers can provide a much-needed source of respite care for family caregivers.
4. **My loved one can't afford home care:** The cost of hiring a professional caregiver varies depending on where an individual lives and how much care is needed, and some seniors can qualify for government financial assistance.
5. **Professional caregivers are abusive:** There is always the danger of abuse or theft when a stranger is taking care of an elder, but these are uncommon occurrences, especially if the individual is employed by an agency.

Caregivers who work with an agency are often more expensive per hour than independent caregivers, but they receive special training in elder care and are bonded and insured by the organization they work for. The home care company is responsible for managing their employees' schedules and making sure the people taking care of your loved one are a good fit when it comes to personality and aptitude. If, on the other hand, you have a friend or acquaintance with caregiving skills, but they don't work with a licensed company, it may seem advantageous to hire them rather than let a complete stranger into your loved one's home. However, there are a few additional considerations to be aware of when dealing with independent caregivers.

Freelancing caregivers who don't work for an agency may or may not be trained in important elder care skills, such as CPR or how to transfer an adult in and out of bed. Hiring an independent caregiver may also put you and your loved one on the hook for employment taxes and insurance. You may also encounter liability issues because many freelance caregivers are uninsured.

There will also be extra steps to take, depending on whether you decide to hire them as an employee or a contractor. Hiring a caregiver as an employee means you'll have to shell out funds for Social Security, unemployment insurance and income taxes. A contractor, on the other hand, foots the bill for their own taxes. However, if you pay a contractor more than \$600 in a single year, you'll need to file a 1099 form with the IRS.

Either way it's best to seek out the services of a finance professional, such as an accountant or a lawyer, to help you legally navigate the world of freelance caregiving.

### **A shift caregiver or a live-in caregiver?**

If your loved one requires more than a few hours of care per day, you'll also need to understand the distinction between caregivers who work in shifts and those who are "live-in" caregivers. As the name implies, a live-in caregiver resides in an elder's home. Shift caregivers, on the other hand, leave after their designated care period is over.



Typically, if you want to hire a live-in caregiver, you'll have to provide them with their own separate bedroom and living space, and you may need to pay for their meals as well. A caregiver who lives in a senior's home isn't considered on-call 24/7—they will require at least eight hours of sleep each night and will periodically go on vacation.

Deciding which situation—live-in or shift—is best for your loved one should be based on several factors:

- **How many hours of care is needed:** Elders who need more than 12 hours of care per day may benefit from the services of a live-in caregiver.
- **Does your loved one sleep through the night:** Seniors with dementia and those plagued by Sundowner's syndrome may be better off with shift workers, who never sleep while on duty. Live-in caregivers will need a full night's sleep, meaning they won't be able to look after your loved one all the time.
- **How your loved one feels about having multiple caregivers:** The primary benefit of a live-in caregiver is that they provide an elder who needs many hours of care with a consistent presence. Shift caregivers often work in blocks of eight or 12 hours, meaning multiple people may come and go each day, adding to your loved one's stress and confusion.
- **Which option is most cost-effective:** Cost is a huge factor when searching for home care. Live-in caregivers tend to cost more than shift caregivers and there are additional security considerations to take into account.

**Confused About Which Kind Of Professional Caregiver To Hire?** Consult [AgingCare.com](http://AgingCare.com)'s directory to connect with home care providers in your area.

[Find Home Care](#)



## Chapter 3

# Finding the Best Home Care Fit

In this chapter, you will uncover important information on what to look for during your search for a home care provider, as well as printable worksheets that you can use to help create the ideal in-home care situation for your loved one.



# Searching for Home Care

One of the benefits of professional in-home care is that it can be tailored to fit a senior's specific needs. Your loved one may only need help a few times a week with housekeeping and transportation to doctor's appointments, or they may need someone to stay with them during the day while you're at work, to prepare meals and help them get to and from the bathroom.

Whatever your situation, professional home care can help, even if simply as a source of respite to give you time off from being a family caregiver.

The main drawback of taking the home care route is that it will likely require you and your family to put your trust in someone who is practically a stranger. Letting an outsider into your house and putting them in charge of a loved one's care can be unnerving (especially in the beginning), which is why it's best to begin your search for home care by consulting a highly-respected resource such as AgingCare.com. [AgingCare.com's home care search tool](#) is linked to a comprehensive nationwide directory of home care providers, enabling you to discover agencies in your area of interest in a matter of seconds. You'll be given the option of having the providers that you're interested in contact you directly to arrange a free consultation for your loved one.

## What to look for in a home care provider

Once you've got a list of the different agencies and individual caregivers you're considering hiring, it's time to thoroughly vet all of your options.

If you're focusing your search on agencies, positive signs include: longevity in the field, the use of federal and state employee background checks, the creation of an individualized care plan for each senior, and a well-defined process for reporting and responding to complaints. Be sure to also ask for at least two references from every agency you're considering.

A printable list of the "20 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Home Care Agency" can be found at the end of this chapter.

If you prefer to go the independent caregiver route, just be aware that you will be responsible for managing the caregiver's schedule and monitoring the quality of their work. There will also be less opportunity for recourse should suspicions of theft or abuse arise.

Most eldercare experts recommend going through a well-known agency when seeking home care and caution against hiring an independent caregiver unless you already have a pre-existing relationship with them.

## What to avoid when hiring professional home care

There are a few common pitfalls that family caregivers fall prey to when hiring outside care. Here are some important missteps to avoid:

**Making assumptions:** It's easy to automatically make dangerous assumptions about what a professional home care provider can and cannot do. For instance, not all agencies are created equal when it comes to handling their caregivers' schedules. Double-check the caregiver contingency plans of the companies you're considering, otherwise you may find yourself in a situation where your loved one's main caregiver has a family emergency and there is no one to cover for them.

**Getting more than you bargained for:** When an elder suddenly falls ill, newly-minted family caregivers often have to make decisions about a loved one's health and care that they are not fully prepared to make. This can result in a senior receiving assistance they don't need or that may not be covered by their insurance. Just because a particular type of care is "advised" doesn't necessarily mean it's a key component of enhancing your loved one's quality of life. Avoid this trap by making it a priority to learn as much as you can about the ins and outs of home care (and other aspects of caring for an aging adult). Start with the immediate concerns first—what does your loved one need, how will they get it and how will they be able to pay for it—then expand your knowledge base from there. Don't be afraid to ask questions when speaking with your loved one's physicians, nurses and professional caregivers.

### Finding The Right Home Care Fit Means Knowing All Your Options.

AgingCare.com's comprehensive home care directory will provide you with a customized list of providers in your area.

[Find Home Care](#)



## 20 Questions to Ask Before Hiring a Home Care Agency

1. How long has your agency been in business?
2. Is your agency Medicare-certified?
3. Which insurance plans do you accept?
4. How do you handle billing and expenses?
5. Can I have a copy of your rights and responsibilities of providers, patients and caregivers?
6. Can I see some of your recent customer satisfaction surveys?
7. How do you find the caregivers you hire? (i.e. newspaper, online advertisements, staff agencies, etc.)
8. What do you look for in job candidates for the caregiver position?
9. What kinds of screenings do you perform before hiring a caregiver? (i.e. federal and state criminal background checks, drug tests, etc.)
10. Are your caregivers insured and bonded through the agency?
11. How do you determine what a caregiver is capable of doing?
12. What training do you give your caregivers?
13. Will you develop a care plan for my loved one? Will you consult with their doctor?
14. Do you typically send the same caregiver to a person's home?
15. What happens if my loved one's regularly scheduled caregiver falls ill or can't make it?
16. If my loved one isn't satisfied with a particular caregiver, will you provide a different one?
17. What is your process for reporting and handling complaints?
18. What's your process for monitoring and evaluating your caregivers?
19. What's your process for responding to emergencies?
20. Can you help my loved one access other services such as Meals on Wheels, or help them find medical equipment?

## 10 Questions to Ask Before Hiring an Independent Caregiver

1. How long have you been in the elder care field?
2. What types of care are you most experienced with providing? (i.e. light housekeeping, preparing meals, providing companionship)
3. What ailments do you have experience dealing with? (i.e. Alzheimer's, arthritis, etc.)
4. Do you have any special training in areas such as CPR or dementia care?
5. Are you bonded and insured?
6. Do you pay your own Social Security, unemployment insurance, and federal and state taxes?
7. How will you keep me informed of my loved one's condition?
8. What happens if you fall ill or can't make a scheduled appointment with my loved one?
9. Do you have any references I could contact?
10. Why did you decide to become a caregiver to the elderly?



## Chapter 4

# How to Pay for Home Care

In this chapter, you will learn more about the various resources that can help you pay for home care services for a loved one, including government benefit programs and personal assets.



# How to Pay for Home Care

The price of home care services in the United States ranges from \$13 per hour to \$32 per hour, depending on where a senior lives, according to figures from Metlife's 2012 Market Survey of Long-Term Care Costs.

Home health aides cost around \$21 per hour, while homemakers and those providing companion care carry a \$20 hourly rate, on average. Aging adults and their families often have to pay at least a portion of their home care bills out-of-pocket. However, there are options available to help defray the cost:

- 1. Medicare:** For those over the age of 65, Medicare Parts A (hospital insurance) and B (medical insurance) may cover certain types of home health care, when offered by a Medicare-certified provider. Beneficiaries must be cared for by a doctor who determines that they are homebound and need physical therapy, occupational therapy or periodic skilled nursing care (blood draws excluded). Services that aren't covered by Medicare include: personal care, home-delivered meals, 24-hour care and homemaker services. A separate initiative, known as the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE), can provide home care services and is jointly administered by Medicare and Medicaid. This program replaces an elder's traditional Medicare coverage. A beneficiary must sign up separately for PACE, which offers a suite of social and medical services that can be provided in a senior's home. Based on their income, some beneficiaries may have to pay a monthly premium to obtain PACE services, while others with lower incomes can access them for free. A senior must be at least 55 years old, live in an area that offers PACE, meet the requirements to receive nursing facility level care and be capable of safely living in a community setting to be eligible for the program.
- 2. Medicaid:** Rules vary by state, but most areas offer some kind of Medicaid-funded program to help older adults receive home health care if they would otherwise have to go to a skilled nursing facility. Elders with Medicaid must apply for a home and community-based services waiver (HCBS) to receive home health support.

3. **Veteran's assistance:** The Department of Veterans Affairs provides long-term care funds to qualified veterans via the Aid and Attendance pension and Housebound pension programs. Money from these programs can be used to pay for both short- and long-term home health care services, provided that they have been deemed medically necessary by a senior's doctor. A veteran must need care from another person to perform activities of daily life, be confined to a bed or be residing in a nursing home to qualify for the Aid & Attendance pension. According to 2012 figures from the VA, former servicemen and women can receive as much as \$1,732 (\$2,054 for a couple) each month to help cover the cost of care. A veteran can also be eligible for up to \$1,113 a month to help pay for care for their ill, non-veteran spouse.
4. **Private health insurance:** Certain health maintenance organizations (HMOs), as well as other health and long-term care insurance plans offer coverage for home health services. Individual benefits vary by plan, so be sure to check a senior's policy for specifics.
5. **Life insurance:** As an alternative to spending down a life insurance policy to qualify for Medicaid coverage, elders can transform an in-force policy into a pre-funded financial account that disburses a monthly benefit stipend to help cover long-term care needs, including home health care.
6. **State and local programs:** Different states offer different programs to assist ailing elders who need help staying in their homes. Check with your local Area Agency on Aging or Department of Aging to see if your loved one meets the qualification criteria for state assistance.
7. **Asset conversion:** Money from retirement accounts, reverse mortgages and home equity lines of credit can be tapped to help pay for home care and other long-term care services. The particulars of converting these kinds of assets into usable funds are complex, so it's best to seek the help of a financial professional.
8. **Private health insurance:** Certain HMOs, as well as other health and long-term care insurance plans offer coverage for home health services. Individual benefits vary by plan, so be sure to check a senior's policy for specifics.

Now that you know how to pay for home care, consult AgingCare.com's home care provider directory to find agencies in your area.

[Find Home Care](#)

## Chapter 5

# Home Care for People With Dementia

In this chapter, you will learn how to distinguish the cognitive changes associated with “normal aging” from those that may signal Alzheimer’s. You will also discover how professional home care providers handle issues that arise from taking care of an elder with dementia.



# Normal Aging or Alzheimer's: What's the Difference?

**A**s a loved one ages, one of the questions that may come up for you and your family is how to tell the difference between the cognitive changes associated with “normal aging” and those that could signal serious underlying health conditions, such as Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia.

At this time, there's no definitive way to distinguish between benign memory slips and full-blown dementia, but consider this as a general rule of thumb: occasionally misplacing the car keys is normal, while forgetting what to do with them is not.

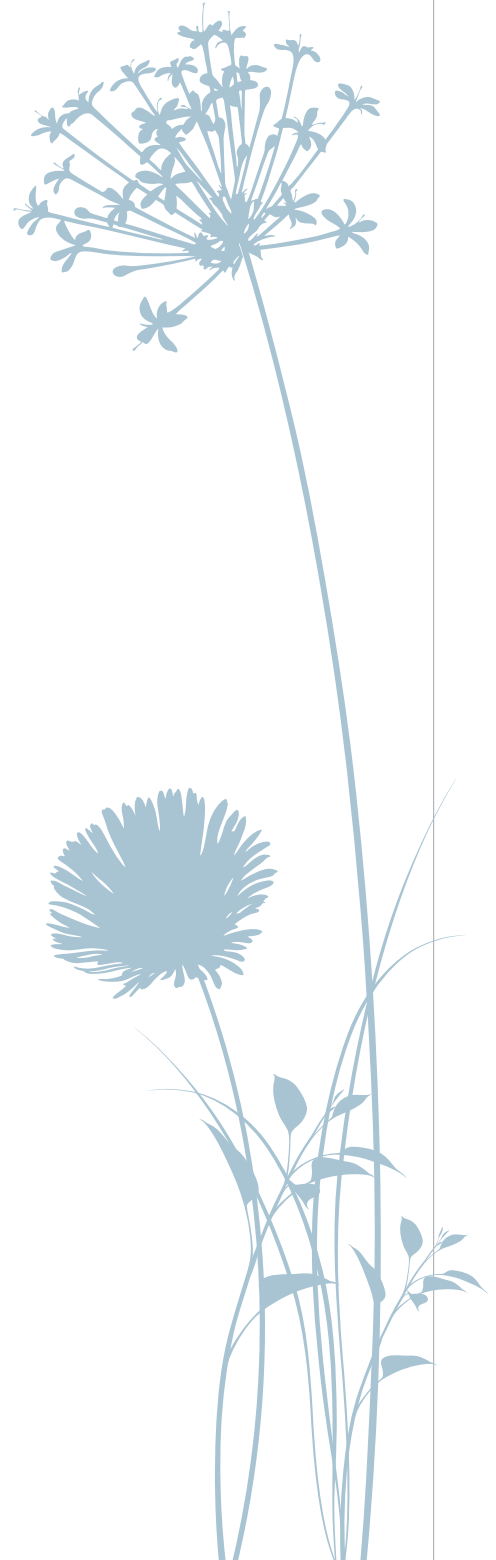
Here are a few additional indicators that your loved one's cognitive troubles may be caused by something more serious than the simple advancing of age:

## **7 Cognitive Concerns That May Be More Than 'Old Age'**

1. Bad judgment (poor financial decisions, public outbursts)
2. Movement issues (stiff movements, hunched posture)
3. Loss of inhibition (saying or doing socially inappropriate things)
4. Language problems (can't form coherent sentences)
5. Hallucinations and delusions (seeing things that aren't really there)
6. Trouble performing familiar tasks (can't remember how to get to the doctor's office)
7. Memory loss that interrupts daily life (regularly forgets recent conversations)

Ultimately, it's up to you and your family to determine if (and when) a loved one's cognitive issues warrant investigation by a medical professional.

Providing care at home is often one of the best ways to keep a loved one with dementia calm and happy because a regular routine and a familiar environment is less likely to cause confusion and anxiety in those with cognitive impairment. However, since dementia care can be an arduous undertaking for family caregivers, you may eventually need to seek out a professional caregiver to provide respite or even full-time care.



# Home Care Considerations for People with Dementia

Since more and more aging adults are being diagnosed with dementia, the number of professional caregivers who are trained to handle people with cognitive impairment is ever increasing.

A 2012 MetLife survey discovered 68 percent of home care companies provide specific training on Alzheimer's to their caregiver employees. This training differs from agency to agency, but typically touches on topics such as how to deal with hallucinations and dementia-related behaviors, as well as strategies for keeping a cognitively challenged individual safe and mentally stimulated.

To exercise an elder's mind and lift their spirits, a professional caregiver will often create special activities based on the senior's specific hobbies and interests.

Art and music are effective forms of therapeutic engagement that can spark memories and emotions in an individual with dementia, no matter which stage they are in. A professional caregiver may have an individual who has been affected by dementia listen to their favorite song, or provide them with art supplies, actions which can ignite seemingly miraculous responses even in those who can't recall their own names.

With the family's permission, a professional caregiver may also be able to take an elder with dementia out to a local museum, park or zoo to spark engagement.

Should an elder's condition progress to the point where they need more intensive care, a home care provider may also be able to help facilitate a transfer to an assisted living community or skilled nursing facility. Such transitions can be difficult, which is why it can be beneficial to have the help of a professional who has experience with such moves.

[Find a home care provider in your area](#) that offers services specifically tailored towards people with Alzheimer's.

[Find Home Care](#)

## Chapter 6

# Handling Home Care on an Ongoing Basis

In this chapter, you will learn what to expect out of a typical home care experience, as well as strategies for addressing common issues that can arise, such as how to help a loved one get used to a new caregiver and how to figure out if a caregiver is doing their job properly.



# Preparing for the Initial Visit

Each home care provider, whether an agency or an independent caregiver, will have their own particular method for learning about their elderly clients' needs and creating a care plan that provides the proper amount of assistance.

Most agencies send someone out prior to the start of care to determine the type of assistance a senior needs and to get a feel for their personality. One benefit of working with an agency is that they have processes in place to ensure that an elder is matched with the right care team. If an agency caregiver doesn't appear to be a good personality fit for an elder, it's easy for the supervisor overseeing that senior's care to find a replacement. Hiring an independent caregiver typically doesn't offer this level of flexibility.

One way you, as a family member, can facilitate the critical knowledge gathering process is by being prepared to answer questions about your loved one's health conditions, care needs, likes and dislikes.

A printable worksheet at the end of this chapter outlines some of the important information to have on hand about your loved one when you first meet the individual in charge of overseeing their care.

## Helping a senior adjust to a new caregiver

While it would be wonderful if your loved one and their caregiver hit it off right away, this isn't often the case. The relationship between a professional caregiver and an elder is one that must be grounded in trust and gradually strengthened over time.

The home care provider you select should take the time to get to know your loved one and ensure that the men and women who will be looking after them have compatible personalities. In addition to getting to know their core group of caregivers, your loved one should also have the opportunity to develop at least a basic rapport with the substitutes who will fill in whenever a regularly-scheduled caregiver is unable to.

You can help facilitate the relationship building process by listening to your loved one's thoughts and feedback about their caregivers, and informing the care advisor if you feel a certain match-up isn't working.

Once these connections click into place, the resistance your loved one has to accepting an outsider into their home should diminish significantly. They may even begin to look forward to visits from their caregivers.





# What to Expect on the First Day

**W**hat actually happens on that first official day of home care? This pivotal encounter has four distinct stages: the introduction, the discussion, the tour and the follow-up.

## The introduction

If you're dealing with a home care agency, chances are that the caregiver won't show up on your doorstep solo. They will probably be accompanied by the care supervisor that the family (and possibly the senior themselves) has already had contact with.

Agencies often do this because seeing a friendly face can ease tensions and pave the way for a more honest, friendly first meeting between your loved one and their new caregiver.

## Building trust through discussion

Once introductions have been made, you (and your loved one, if they are cognitively capable of understanding) will sit down with the professional caregiver and the care supervisor to review the care plan.

While the care plan will typically have been fleshed out prior to the first time a caregiver comes to look after an elder, it's important to go over it again—just to make sure everyone understands what the caregiver will be responsible for doing. Also, because a senior's needs are always changing, the plan may require revision.

After the agenda has been fully discussed and vetted, the care coordinator will typically bow out (after they've made sure you know how to get in touch with them), leaving you and your loved one alone with the professional caregiver for the first time.

This first day is mainly about building a relationship between the care provider and the senior they're going to be looking after; finding common ground and developing a connection should be the first priorities.

If your loved one is cognitively capable of responding, the professional caregiver may ask them some questions to get to know them better: What are your hobbies? How many children do you have? What is your favorite meal?

The caregiver may also share a bit of background about themselves, their training and why they decided to enter the professional care field.

## Taking the tour

Next, you and your loved one will take the new caregiver on a tour of the house, showing them around and familiarizing them with the location of important rooms and items.

What happens next generally depends on what the caregiver has been hired to do.

If the caregiver is there for a short time to help out with laundry, housekeeping and other similar tasks, they should first make sure your loved one is comfortable, then go about performing their duties.

If more intensive personal care is required, a caregiver's first priority should be to secure the physical wellbeing of your loved one. He or she may check to make sure that your loved one is dry, comfortable and that any medical equipment they rely on is working properly.

## Don't fear an honest follow-up

After a caregiver has completed their shift, the agency will check-in to see what went well, what went wrong and what can be done better in the future. Use this opportunity to honestly evaluate the caregiver and voice any concerns you may have.

Your loved one may hesitate to say anything negative about their caregiver because they worry about getting them "in trouble." This is why it's important for you to feel comfortable passing along any and all feedback about the caregiver, even if it's that he or she used too much soap when running the dishwasher. Unvoiced concerns can't be remedied and could create significant problems in the future.



## Taking it day by day

When an elderly loved one is sick, being patient may seem like an impossible task. But it's vital to keep in mind that managing professional home care is an ongoing process.

The day a new caregiver starts is about accomplishing two main goals: executing the initial care plan, and establishing a good relationship between the professional caregiver and the care recipient. Beyond that, it's just about monitoring and modifying the situation as needed to ensure your loved one is receiving the care they need.

## How to Know if a Caregiver is Doing a Good Job

Once you've hired a professional caregiver, you'll be faced with a new challenge: determining whether the person you've entrusted your loved one's well-being to is doing a good job.

It's a tricky task—one that's made more difficult by the complex mixture of emotions that accompany hiring outside help. You may begin to feel as though you're always on the edge of another potential crisis. Thankfully, there are ways to fend off the freak-out and figure out if a professional caregiver is doing the job you hired them to do.

Thoroughly vetting whatever independent caregiver or agency you hire is the first (and best) step to making sure a home care professional will perform well, once they're on the job. Unfortunately, no amount of background research can guarantee that everything will run smoothly.

The best way to evaluate a hired helper is to stop by, unannounced, and check to see how things are going. Long-distance caregivers may not be able to do this as frequently as those who live close by.



Here are a few questions to ask during a drop-in:

1. **Is the care plan being followed?** There should always be an official care plan in place before the caregiver walks in the door on the first day. Any deviations from the plan, unless they were previously discussed, should not be tolerated.
2. **Does my loved one appear safe and well-adjusted?** Unless there are actual signs of mistreatment or abuse (bruises, cuts, etc.), it can sometimes be tricky to gauge whether a senior is safe with a new caregiver. Look for behavioral signs from your loved one such as withdrawing, or a reluctance to talk about time spent with the caregiver.
3. **Is my loved one's quality of life being improved?** The ultimate goal of home care is to improve an elder's quality of life. Family members should try and determine whether or not their loved one's existence is being noticeably enhanced by a caregiver's presence.
4. **Is my loved one expressing concern?** If your loved one is of sound mind and they voice concerns about a caregiver, you should discuss the issue with the agency office first, as opposed to addressing the caregiver directly. This will help avoid conflict and make the correction process go smoothly for everyone involved. Bear in mind that if an elder suffers from a disease that impairs their cognitive abilities (i.e. Alzheimer's) they may be prone to making unintentional false accusations against a caregiver. In these situations, it's important to remember to take your loved one's complaints seriously, but allow for the possibility that their disease may be impacting their ability to understand what the caregiver is doing and why.
5. **Does the caregiver communicate well?** Communication is essential to maintaining a safe, effective relationship with a professional care provider. It's important for everyone involved in the care process (family members, professional caregiver, care managers and the senior themselves) to be open and honest.
6. **Does the caregiver seem invested in the well-being of my loved one?** Is the caregiver attentive to your loved one's needs? Do they maintain a calm, concerned demeanor when dealing with difficult behaviors?
7. **Is the caregiver reliable?** Do they show up to the house on time and ready to work? Do they often have to have other caregivers cover their shift? You should be able to expect a reasonable amount of consistency from professional caregivers; too much turnover can be stressful for your loved one.
8. **Does the agency keep tabs on their caregivers?** Most reputable home care agencies will have supervisors who will come by the house on a regular basis—sometimes announced, sometimes unannounced—to check and make sure that the caregiver is following the care plan and to see how the elder is doing.

While it's important to make sure your loved one is getting the best care, it's equally crucial to avoid prematurely pulling the plug on the idea of professional home care. It's not uncommon for an elder to have to go through multiple caregivers before they find one they're comfortable with.

If a professional caregiver had to be hired in a hurry, they may not be the best fit for your loved one, but that doesn't mean that the whole idea of home care is a bust. Agencies can miss the mark when matching caregivers with care recipients, especially if the senior suffers from a mood-altering disease such as depression or Alzheimer's.

Ultimately though, it's important to trust your gut when it comes to hiring and firing professional home care providers. If your instincts are telling you something's wrong, then you may want to dig a little deeper before hiring an individual or an agency.

## Detecting and Reporting Abuse

**E**lder abuse is an issue that should not be ignored—particularly when you're allowing a stranger to come into the house and look after an elderly family member. Statistics show that the older and more cognitively impaired a senior is, the more likely they are to be a victim of mistreatment.

The precise frequency of elder abuse in America is difficult to determine since so many cases go unreported or overlooked. Only one out of every 14 incidences of elder abuse are ever brought to the authorities, according to the National Research Council. While most elder abuse happens at the hands of a family member, professional caregivers have also been known to take advantage of the seniors they care for.

It's impossible to pinpoint an abuser in a single glance or even after meeting them a few times, but there are some signs and behaviors that might indicate your loved one is being mistreated.

### **An abused senior may:**

- Develop suspicious physical injuries—bruises, slap marks, burns, cuts, etc.
- See changes in their financial accounts and legal documents—unusual withdrawals and transfers, altered wills, POAs and trusts
- Have health concerns that haven't been attended to—untreated wounds
- Experience unexplainable weight loss
- Become isolated from family and friends
- Withdraw from normal activities

### **A potential abuser may:**

- Have a history of alcoholism or addiction
- Appear indifferent to a senior and their needs
- Threaten to hurt an elder's pet
- Call a senior names
- Be overly controlling of an elder's actions
- Be diagnosed with mental illness

Also, home care agencies that have high staff turnover or who don't conduct thorough background checks on their caregivers may be more likely to employ a person with abusive tendencies.

## Reporting elder abuse

Whether and when to report suspected abuse of an elderly loved one can be a challenging choice for family members to make.

It's not uncommon for a person with Alzheimer's or another dementia to accuse a person (even family members) of stealing from or defrauding them in some way. So when a cognitively impaired loved one accuses their professional caregiver of wrongdoing, you may find yourself wondering whether to believe them, or wait for further proof.

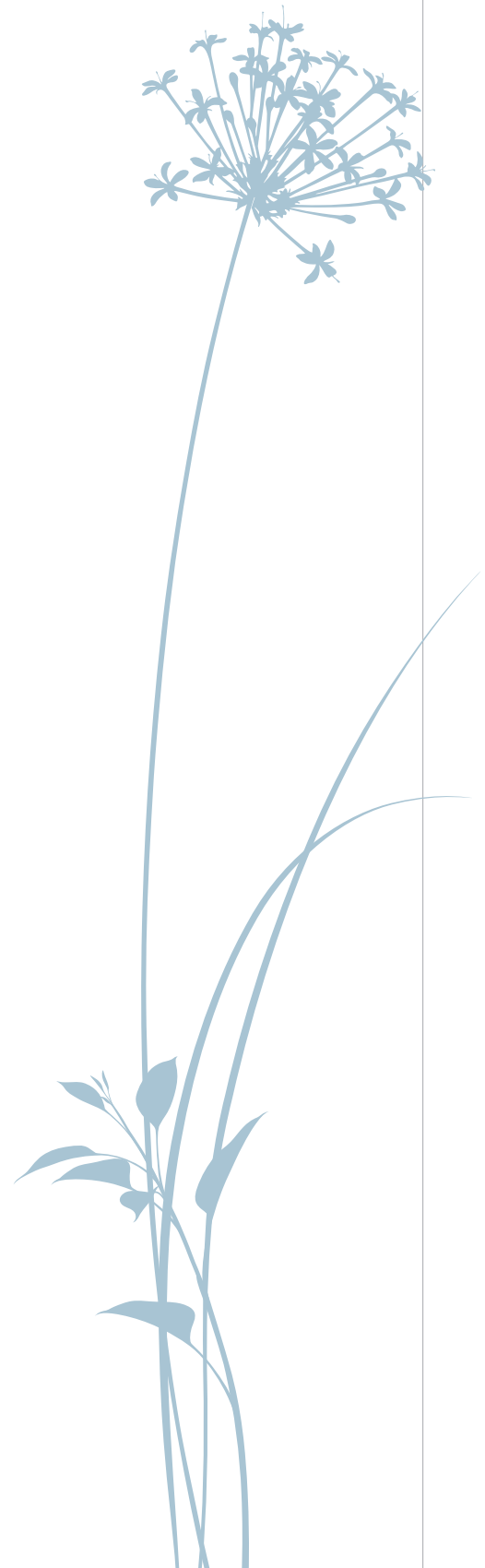
If you suspect your loved one is being abused, it's important to contact the proper authorities right away. If a senior is in life-threatening danger, call the police or 9-1-1 as soon as possible. If it's not a matter of immediate life and death, you can begin the process by contacting your local Adult Protective Services agency or Long-Term Care Ombudsman.

Though not necessary, it's always best to try and provide some form of tangible proof of elder abuse. This can be challenging, especially in situations where you suspect a caregiver of stealing a loved one's medications or valuables.

So-called "nanny cams" are an option to try and catch an unscrupulous caregiver in the act, but be sure to check your local laws regarding in-home surveillance practices. Some states don't allow such videos to contain audio recordings and it isn't legal to videotape someone in private areas, such as the bathroom, or a live-in caregiver's bedroom.

Any home care company worth its salt will have a formal system in place for filing a complaint and will take an allegation of theft or abuse by one of their caregivers very seriously.

Take your grievances to an administrator or manager, as opposed to confronting the caregiver directly or their immediate supervisor. This will hopefully make the process run more smoothly and avoid putting you or your loved one in a potentially dangerous situation.



# Important Information to Tell a Home Care Provider

## Weekly Schedule

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

## Health conditions: Check all that apply

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alzheimer's/dementia | <input type="checkbox"/> HIV/AIDS            | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disorder (please describe) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arthritis            | <input type="checkbox"/> Incontinence        | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cancer               | <input type="checkbox"/> Kidney disease      | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cataracts            | <input type="checkbox"/> Lung disease        | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> COPD                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Osteoporosis        | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diabetes             | <input type="checkbox"/> Parkinson's disease | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression           | <input type="checkbox"/> Stroke              | _____   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart disease        | <input type="checkbox"/> Thyroid condition   | _____   |

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Medications: List all medications your loved one takes, including dosage and frequency:

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Does your loved one have any dietary restrictions? If so, please describe:

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List your loved one's hobbies and interests:

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Describe any other preferences, likes, dislikes, etc. you feel anyone looking after your loved one should be aware of:

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## Conclusion

Utilizing the services of a professional home care provider, while not ideal in every situation, can help enhance the health and wellbeing of your elderly loved one and simultaneously remove some of the pressure and stress from you and the rest of the family.

Hopefully this guide has provided you with some insight into the inner workings of how to hire and handle professional home care providers—just one of the resources you may need while you navigate your path as a family caregiver.

Now that you know what to expect when hiring and managing home care for an elderly loved one, [use AgingCare.com's home care provider directory to start your search.](#)



## About AgingCare.com

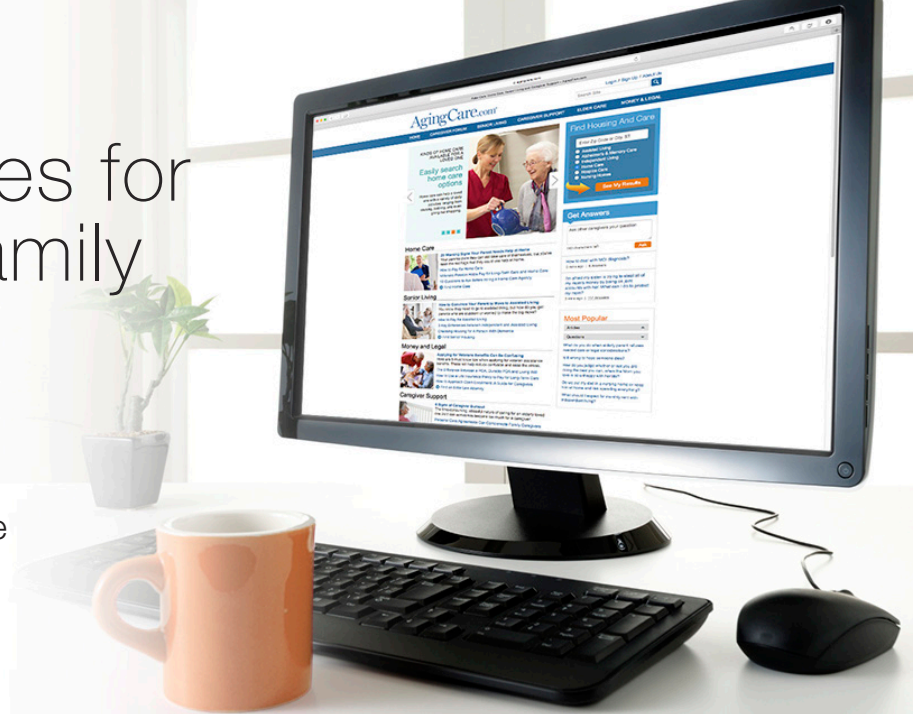
AgingCare.com exists to fulfill one simple yet critical mission: to provide free information and support to help those caring for elderly family members.

The reality of our ever-aging population means that the demand for caregivers will continue to rise. As more and more family members step into this role, we are committed to being the trusted resource that they can rely on to make informed decisions and ease the stress of caregiving.

AgingCare.com is the go-to destination for family caregivers, providing trusted information, practical answers to real-life questions, and ongoing support through every challenge.

# Helpful Resources for You and Your Family

Our goal is to provide families with the information and resources they need to care for their loved ones so they can enjoy their time together more and worry less. As an advocate for the family caregiver, all of our services are provided at no cost.



## Home Care Services

**FIND HOME CARE** [www.AgingCare.com/Find-Home-Care](http://www.AgingCare.com/Find-Home-Care)

Our Home Care Referral Program assists families in finding in-home care services. A care advisor will assess your needs and assist in arranging free in-home consultations with local agencies.

***Speak with a Care Advisor 1 (888) 495-8727***

## Senior Housing Services

**FIND SENIOR HOUSING** [www.AgingCare.com/Find-Senior-Housing](http://www.AgingCare.com/Find-Senior-Housing)

Senior housing includes Assisted Living, Independent Living and Memory Care Communities. Have a care advisor provide you with pricing information, availability and a list of services for communities in your area.

***Speak with a Care Advisor 1 (888) 848-5698***

## Support Groups

**VIEW ALL SUPPORT GROUPS** [www.AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum](http://www.AgingCare.com/Caregiver-Forum)

Get answers and support from other family caregivers and elder care experts in online Support Groups that address each of these topics:

[Alzheimer's & Dementia](#)

[Diabetes](#)

[New to Caregiving](#)

[Caregiver Burnout](#)

[Grief Support](#)

[Parkinson's Disease](#)

[Depression](#)

[Incontinence Care](#)

[Veterans Assistance](#)

## Funeral Services

**FREE PLANNING GUIDE** [www.AgingCare.com/Dignity](http://www.AgingCare.com/Dignity)

Download a funeral planning guide and locate funeral homes and cemeteries in your area to help you arrange the final tribute for your loved one or yourself.

**FIND A FUNERAL HOME** [www.AgingCare.com/local/Funeral-Homes](http://www.AgingCare.com/local/Funeral-Homes)

**FIND A CEMETERY** [www.AgingCare.com/local/Cemeteries](http://www.AgingCare.com/local/Cemeteries)