

Finding the right home care

Choosing a home care provider is a big decision and it's worth taking your time and doing your research. You should speak with potential providers, agencies and carers to find the best solution. The more information you have, the more confident you'll feel when you finally make your decision.

We've created this handy list of questions to ask to help you find the right home care provider.

Our top tips

Create a list of care needs

Before contacting anyone create a list of your care needs and outline how you'd like these needs to be met.

Ask for recommendations

It always helps if you know someone who is currently receiving care at home. Ask them about their experiences and find out which home care provider they're with.

You could also contact:

- health care professionals such as doctors, nurses and social workers, and
- organisations that supports the elderly such as Age UK.

Consider whether you'll use an agency or employ someone directly to provide your care

Some people use a home care agency to provide care at home while others choose to appoint an individual to meet their needs (either as an employee or on a self-employed basis).

If you're employing someone to care for you at home rather than using an agency, make sure you:

- take legal advice before you commit, and
- get proper contracts drawn up.

Get the right type of care

Home care services vary, so make sure the agencies or people you approach can provide the services you need. Typical home care services include:

- **Companion services:** Supervision, recreational activities and visiting.
- **Personal care services:** Help with eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, exercising and other personal care.
- **Homemaker services:** Housekeeping, shopping and meal preparation.
- **Skilled care:** Medical injections, wound care, physical therapy and other medical needs provided by a licensed health professional. Typically, these types of skilled care services are ordered by a doctor and a home health care agency co-ordinates them.

Arrange a home visit

Once you've found a provider or carer, and you're satisfied with the type of care they can offer, arrange a home visit with them. This will give them the chance to familiarise themselves with any challenges that could arise in the home, and enable them to be more proactive when providing care. For example, help may be required for getting in and out of a stair lift or when going to the bathroom.

It's a good idea to have a third person present at the meeting so you can discuss your thoughts with them afterwards.

Share your information

The more you tell someone about your needs the better they can meet them. Make sure they know what's important to you, describe a typical day and tell them about your life. This can help them form a better picture of your needs and requirements, and help create bonds with your carer(s). You should feel confident that your care needs will always be met.

Questions to ask an agency

When you meet with a home care agency it's important to be prepared. Getting answers to the following questions will help you decide if the agency is right for you.

1. About the agency

- How long have they been in business?
- Are they licensed or accredited?
- Are their carers insured?
- Do they offer a visit from a registered nurse prior to the start of the service?
- What kind of quality control checks are made by supervisory personnel?
- How frequently are quality control checks made?
- Who is available if problems arise?
- Is a 24-hour call to a registered nurse available?
- What happens if a carer doesn't show up?
- Are there a minimum number of hours or days per week required?
- Is 24-hour care available in case of an emergency?

2. Agency staff

- What kind of criminal background checks are performed on their prospective carers?
- Do they check references? If so, how many?
- Can they provide job descriptions for their carers?
- Are personnel files updated annually?
- What kind of experience/certification do their carers have to have?
- What type of training do they provide to their carers?
- Does the training cover Alzheimer's and dementia care (if needed)?
- Who pays the worker's social security or other insurance?

- Is a care plan written up for each client?
- Will the same person be providing care on a regular basis?
- Is a list of agency references available to check the level of client satisfaction?
- Can you interview a carer and is there a fee for this?
- Do their carers all have their own reliable transport?
- If specialised medical care is needed, are their carers licensed to perform this?

3. The costs

- How much do their services cost?
- What is included in that price?
- Are there any additional costs for weekends, holidays or other times?
- What is the billing procedure? Do you pay the care provider or carer directly?

Questions to ask a carer

You may prefer to hire a carer independently. If you do, the list below should help you get the answers you need:

- How long have they been working as a carer?
- Are they with an agency?
- What type of help or care do they provide?
- Are there a minimum number of hours they require or can work?
- What are their costs (if independent)?
- Are they trained in first aid and CPR?
- Can they provide references?
- Have they undergone background checks?
- Are they available at the times needed?
- Are they able to provide backup care if they are ill?
- Do they have carer's liability insurance in place? What does it provide cover for?
- Do they have their own transport?
- Are they able to manage your specific health and care needs?
- Do you have any needs they're unfamiliar or uncomfortable with?
- What is their approach to caring for someone living with dementia?
- Do they have experience working with someone with dementia?
- Are they specifically trained in dementia care (if needed)?