

Preparing for a move

This information is for you if you are caring for someone living with dementia and you are preparing to move them to a long-term care home. From talking to families, we know that moving the person you care for to a long-term care home may be one of the most difficult decisions you will ever have to make. This information covers things to think about and hands-on tips to help you better prepare for the move.

The wait for a space in a long-term care home may be long, but the move is often sudden. If a space becomes available, it is common for the home to require an immediate commitment to take the space, often with a moving date within the next couple of days.



A note about the terms we use:

- “Caregiver” refers to anyone involved in caring for or providing support to someone living with dementia.
- “Dementia” refers to all kinds of dementia—including the most common kind, Alzheimer’s disease.
- “Long-term care home” and “home” refer to a “nursing home”. The terms for nursing home vary across Canada; we use “long-term care home” or “home” for easier reading.

Many caregivers find that they do not have enough time to organize the logistics of the move, such as visiting the home before the move, filling out the required paperwork, packing belongings, arranging for movers and preparing the person living with dementia for the move.

You can make the move easier for you as the caregiver and for the person living with dementia by being prepared. To prepare for the move ahead of time, follow these tips:

Be open with others; talk about the decision and the upcoming move.

Changes that a move brings can be upsetting, so many families may avoid talking about it. However, once you start a discussion, it gets easier. Others who are less involved in caregiving or live out of town may not fully appreciate the need for a move. Let others know about why a decision has been made to move the person living with dementia into long-term care (e.g. safety concerns). Share information about dementia and encourage them to take part in the moving process.

Arrange for a visit to the home to help familiarize the person living with dementia.

It is important to make the person feel as comfortable as possible with the move that may come up suddenly. If possible, arrange for the person to visit the homes that you are considering for them. Many homes make their social activities available to the public; consider having the person attend a few programs to become familiar with each home. This can be time consuming, so arrange visits to the homes that you think are the most likely options. Recognize that sometimes visiting each home is just not possible, especially if the move must be made quickly.

If you are employed, consider talking with your employer about the possibility that you may need some time off with very little notice. Try to save a few vacation days in case the move comes up suddenly. Remember to have money saved to pay for the home's first month's rent and any other services that the person may need (e.g. phone, cable television). If you own your own business or are a contract worker, try to prepare for a partner, employee or subcontractor to take on work when you are not available during the move. Also, pre-arrange for a family member or friend to be available on standby to care for children or help, if necessary.

Ask the home what you can do before moving day. Ask the home about specific processes and procedures related to the move. See if you can do any of them ahead of time, like doing paperwork before moving day. Ask the home if they have restrictions around what items the resident can bring with them (bed, dresser, bedding etc.). Also check whether you can prepare the space ahead of time by moving anything in or decorating.

Have as many familiar items in the new space as possible. After consulting with the home about which types of items are permissible to bring, take the time to sort through treasured items during this waiting time. Talk with the person and other family members when deciding what items to bring to the long-term care home, what items to store, and what items to give away. Familiar belongings may help the person feel more at ease and adjust to the new environment. Depending on what the home allows, consider bringing the person's own bedding, photographs, radio, music or a favourite pillow. Some find comfort by holding body pillows or a familiar stuffed toy. These items can also help personalize the space. Sometimes it is helpful to give the staff a recording of your voice on an old device to play for the person.

Remember to bring essential items. If the home doesn't already provide, bring essential items such as medications, clothing (labelled), toiletries and personal items such as incontinence products, emergency phone numbers, medical coverage cards, equipment or aids (e.g. hearing aids) and batteries.

Keep in mind that items can get lost in the home. Valuable items can get lost in the long-term care home so avoid bringing them (e.g. jewelry, medals, watches, etc.).

Make care decisions before the moving day. On the moving day, staff need to know what your wishes are if the person's condition worsens. Make sure to discuss the following care options with family members before moving day so that you can answer questions about future care:

- Key contacts
- Power of attorney
- List of medications and previous health assessments (if available)
- Medical coverage and insurance benefits
- Medical treatments
- Advance care directives or living will

"I put a dab of pink nail polish on the arm of my mother's glasses as she would put them down and they would go missing." – Caregiver

Source: Adapted from Ontario Health, Queen's Printer for Ontario. (2017). Long-term care. healthcareathome.ca

See the next page for tips on how to address common concerns about preparing for a move.



Tips for preparing for a move

Common concerns about preparing for the move	Tips to help address your concerns
I don't know what to expect.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Visit or call the home and ask what you can expect on moving day:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Can a staff member or volunteer give me and the person living with dementia a tour of the home?- Which staff will be available on moving day to help the person while I am taking care of paperwork?- What should I pack for moving day and is there anything I shouldn't bring?- Do I need to bring a list of the medications that the person is taking?- Do I need to bring incontinence products for the person?- Do I need to label all of the person's belongings?- If some clothing doesn't need a label, what happens when it is laundered?- Whom should I ask for when we arrive?- Should I bring a void cheque or banking information for automatic payments?
I'm working/travelling/ have child care responsibilities and am not sure how I can be available on short notice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to save a few vacation days for the time of the move.• Tell the homes that have your name on the waiting list how to contact you if you are travelling.• Arrange for a family member or friend to be available on standby to provide child care during moving day.• Contact local moving companies to learn about their process.
I don't know what my role will be after the person moves into the home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discuss with a social worker at the home about what they expect of caregivers regarding providing support for the person living with dementia.• Let the staff know that you want to be to be involved in caring for the person.

<p>I'm not sure how to feel like a member of the care team.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships with the staff and regularly communicate with the team. Be open and honest. • Consider getting involved in the daily life of the home by joining the home's Family Council or volunteering to give tours for potential residents and their families. • It is important for staff to understand that the resident had a full and rewarding life before their diagnosis. At the initial care planning meeting, share your knowledge of the person (including their likes and dislikes) and your experience of caring for them.
<p>I'm not sure what to do if I have questions or concerns about the care provided in the long-term care home after the move.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about your expectations and what is reasonable. Work with staff to improve the person's experience. • Be open about your concerns and speak to a social worker or Director of Care. • Acknowledge that staff members are trying hard. Many go out of their way to provide the best possible care; treat them with respect and appreciate their efforts. For example, saying "thank you" goes a long way! • If the staff or Director of Care are not able to resolve your care concerns, speak to the home's administrator or submit a complaint through the home's complaint process.

This resource is informed by research and the experiences of people living with dementia and their caregivers. We thank Catherine Hofstetter, caregiver, for her review of this resource. To provide feedback on this factsheet, please email publications@alzheimer.ca.

Alzheimer Society



Alzheimer Society of Canada
20 Eglinton Avenue West, 16th Floor, Toronto, Ontario M4R 1K8
National Office: 1-800-616-8816

 alzheimer.ca

 @AlzheimerCanada  @AlzCanada  @AlzheimerCanada

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