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Sonata

ASSISTED LIVING | MEMORY CARE

Guide to Finding the Right Memory Care
Community for Your Loved One



When your loved one is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or a related form of dementia, the entire family feels the impact. Spouses and adult children try every possible solution to keep their loved one safe and healthy at home.

For many families, however, the challenges created by the disease become too much to safely manage in a home environment. It often becomes necessary to seek the support of a memory care community for a short-term respite stay or for a permanent move.

We designed this guide to help families like yours learn more about memory care communities. From recognizing the warning signs that indicate it may be time for a move to knowing what to look for and ask when touring memory care communities, we'll provide you with the information and resources you need to make an informed decision.

Table of Contents

Is It Time to Consider a Move to a Memory Care Community?

- Identifying the telltale signs
- Accepting the need for change

Key Factors to Consider in the Search for a Memory Care Community

- Philosophy of care
- What to look for and ask when you visit
- The caregivers and support staff
- Life enrichment opportunities
- Safety features
- Medication

Meals and Nutrition in a Memory Care Community

- Meeting unique dining challenges
- Specialty menus

Comparing the Costs of Memory Care

- Average cost of memory care in Florida
- How memory care costs differ from assisted living expenses

Financing Memory Care

- Long-term care insurance
- Bridge loans
- Life Insurance conversion to a healthcare benefit
- Tax deductions and credits for senior care expenses
- Veterans' benefits
- Reverse mortgage

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Is it Time to Consider a Move to a Memory Care Community?

Despite your best efforts, you might be struggling to meet your loved one's needs at home. It may be safety concerns, nutritional needs, or even a lack of quality enrichment activities that leave you wondering if it is time for a move. What are some of the telltale signs that it's time to begin your search for a memory care community?

Warning Signs that Indicate a Change is Needed

Here are a few of the warning signs to look for:

1. Wandering: Three of five adults with Alzheimer's will wander from home at some point during the disease progression. Research further shows that if a senior wanders once, they are more likely to wander again. Those who aren't found within the first 24 hours are more likely to be seriously injured or even lose their life.

2. Weight loss: Meeting a loved one's nutritional needs also becomes a greater challenge as Alzheimer's disease progresses. Families may struggle to figure out what foods to serve their loved one and what to do to keep them seated long enough to eat. The vision problems that often develop in people with Alzheimer's make it tough for them to distinguish food on the plate. An unhealthy amount of weight loss often occurs because of these difficulties. http://journalofdementiacare.com/dementia_finger_foods_menu/

3. Agitation: Anxiety and agitation are common with Alzheimer's. A loss of verbal skills, as well as a lack of meaningful life enrichment activities can further exacerbate the problem. Adults who move to a memory care community often experience an improved quality of life as a direct result of structured days filled with opportunities for engagement.



4. Caregiver overload: Another sign that it's time for a move is when the family caregivers begin developing mental and physical health problems of their own. The role of caregiving is difficult under the best of circumstances, but when a senior has Alzheimer's, it is doubly so. If the primary caregiver and others who provide support start experiencing headaches, stomach problems, bouts of depression, insomnia, or high blood pressure it might be the result of caregiver burnout.

If any of these concerns could be used to describe your current situation, it is probably time to begin exploring memory care communities nearby.

Accepting the Need for Change

One of the hurdles many families face in making the decision to move a loved one to a memory care community, is accepting that it is okay to ask for and admit the family needs help. It may be even more difficult if you promised your senior loved one you would never make them leave their home. These are both tough issues for families to come to terms with. What might help relieve some of the fear and guilt you are feeling is knowing that memory care communities welcome and encourage family involvement. You can continue to play a very active role in your family member's daily life after the move.

Another positive result of this move is that you will now have a care partner with expertise in improving the quality of life for adults with Alzheimer's disease. Your loved one will benefit from a more structured day, a full calendar of life enrichment opportunities, an environment designed to work with their remaining abilities, and dining program dedicated to meeting their unique nutritional needs.

Key Factors to Consider in the Search for a Memory Care Community

Every memory care community in Florida is unique. Each one has its own individual personality. Finding a community that is a good fit for your senior loved one, means taking their personal preferences, needs, and interests into consideration. For example, if your dad is more comfortable in relaxed surroundings where he can wear his favorite blue jeans and have access to the outdoors, you will want to find a memory care community that fits his personality. One that has a secure outdoor area for him to enjoy is important.

Maybe you are searching for a community for a great aunt who has always liked a more formal environment. A community that is a little more upscale where residents dress up for dinner might be the best solution for her. While personal preferences like these are important, there are other equally important factors to take into consideration.

Making the Most of a Memory Care Visit

Use these tips to help you better understand what to look for and what questions to ask when you visit each memory care community on your list.

1. Philosophy of Care

Begin by learning more about each memory care community's philosophy of care.

- How do they help each resident maintain their individuality?
- How do they get to know and honor the person's life and history?
- Does the resident's individual plan of care take their life stories, hobbies, and interest into consideration?
- Does the community use a person-directed approach to care to determine the resident's schedule?

Finding a memory care partner that provides just the right amount of support to allow a resident to stay safe but independent for as long as possible is important.

2. Caregivers and Support Staff

The experience, compassion, and commitment of caregivers and other key staff members directly impacts the quality of care each resident receives. When you visit, ask how caregivers are recruited and trained. Also inquire about on-going training to ensure caregivers have an opportunity to update their skills on a regular basis.

It's also important to learn about the staff-to-resident ratios: how many caregivers are available during the day and over the nighttime hours to care for residents?



The fewer residents each staff member is responsible for, the better. It means each resident receives more one-on-one time with caregivers.

Staff-to-resident ratios are important, but they don't tell the whole story. As you are touring each memory care community, pay close attention to how the staff interacts with residents. Do caregivers and residents seem comfortable with one another? Are staff members calling residents by name? Do interactions seem positive and kind?

3. Life Enrichment Opportunities

A good memory care community will have activities that meet the needs and interests of residents at every stage of Alzheimer's disease. Programs should take place during evenings and on weekends, and not just during traditional business hours.

Also look for a memory care community that uses an ability-centered approach to care. This means the focus is on what each resident can do, and not on the skills and abilities that have been lost because of their disease. The life enrichment staff should be offering activities that work around each resident's losses to keep them active and engaged with life despite their diagnosis.

It's also nice to find a memory care community that offers on-site conveniences, such as a beauty/barber shop, transportation, as well as visiting physicians and therapists.



4. Safety Features and a Supportive Environment

Safety is one of the leading reasons families seek the support of a memory care community. A memory care program should be designed to keep residents safe without making them feel trapped. Wander prevention systems need to be subtle, yet effective. Dementia research also shows that memory care communities designed to look more like a neighborhood are most effective in helping residents relax and feel at home.

As you visit communities, look for one with an open floor plan and common areas for residents and families to enjoy.

Other signs of a well-designed environment are:

- Built-in visual cues that make it easier for an adult with memory loss to find their way around
- Front porches that encourage socialization and provide a sense of home
- Secure courtyards that provide access to nature and the outdoors.

5. Medication Management

When you meet with the staff at each memory care community on your list, ask about their medication management program. How do they keep your loved one safely on track with their medication schedule? Does the staff handle prescription refills? Is there a preferred pharmacy? How is the billing handled? Safe medication management policies are another vital part of a memory care community.



Meals and Nutrition in a Memory Care Community

Families often struggle to help a senior loved one with Alzheimer's disease maintain a well-balanced diet. It can lead to an unhealthy amount of weight loss. Problems range from knowing what foods to serve when someone has difficulty managing utensils to creating a dining space that encourages the senior to sit still and focus on their meal.

When touring communities, look for those that incorporate some of the best practices proven to promote good nutrition in adults with dementia:

- Meals that incorporate nutritious finger foods which don't require the use of utensils or those that can be eaten with a spoon. (Spoons are generally easier to use for those struggling with coordination.) http://journalofdementiacare.com/dementia_finger_foods_menu/.
- A peaceful, distraction-free dining environment. This reduces the risk for overstimulation which often triggers agitation and pacing, a behavior that can keep a person with Alzheimer's from sitting down to eat their food.
- Frequent hydration breaks are offered to residents throughout the day to encourage them to drink water.
- Because vision changes are common in people with Alzheimer's, it can be difficult for them to distinguish the food from their plate. Ask the communities you tour if they use techniques like placing a white dinner plate on a bright, solid-colored placemat to make meal time easier.
- Ask if caregivers are available to assist or to provide cues during meal times. Some residents just need verbal cues (e.g. "pick up your spoon and scoop up your applesauce") while other residents might need more hands-on support.

Make sure you ask enough questions to feel confident that the community has a plan in place for promoting a healthy diet and preventing weight loss.



Comparing the Costs of Memory Care

As is true of any type of senior housing, families often struggle to understand how to compare the cost of one memory care community with another. Because there isn't a standard, industry-wide pricing model, it's important to understand what is – and isn't – included in the monthly fees.

One question families often have is if a memory care community is more expensive than assisted living and what accounts for the difference.

In most states, memory care is more expensive than traditional assisted living. In Florida, for example, the average cost of an assisted living community is approximately \$3,400 a month while the average cost of a memory care assisted living community is just under \$4,000 per month. What accounts for the difference in price?

A few of the most notable differences include:

- Specialty caregivers who receive additional training on a routine basis
- Residents in memory care often require more support than those in traditional assisted living communities
- The physical environment – security, wandering prevention systems, visual cues – are more expensive to build and to maintain.

Make sure you ask each community you visit for a list of what services and amenities are included in the monthly fee and, equally important, what additional expenses you are likely to incur each month.

While the majority of families use private funds to finance a senior loved one's move to a memory care community, there are sometimes additional options that are available to them. We'll move on to discuss each one next.



Financing Memory Care

When you are creating a budget for a loved one moving to a memory care community, take some time to determine if they qualify for any additional financial support. Here are a few options to investigate on their behalf:

- **Long-term care insurance:** Some families mistakenly believe these policies only pay for nursing homes. The reality is that many also have an assisted living benefit that includes memory care communities. Check your senior loved one's policy or call the insurer to see if assistance for memory care is included.
- **Bridge loan:** A short-term loan can help bridge the financial gap while a senior's home is being readied for a sale or while waiting for the most opportune time to liquidate assets and investments. <https://elderlifefinancial.com/>
- **Life Insurance conversion:** Another option to discuss with an experienced financial planner is an insurance conversion. They can help you connect with a reputable life settlement company. These companies purchase life insurance policies which a senior no longer needs. While they don't pay full face value, they typically pay more than the policy's surrender value.
- **Tax deductions:** An often overlooked benefit is the tax deduction for senior care expenses. It's a complicated area of the tax law, but one an accountant with experience in the aging services industry can help you explore.
- **Veterans' benefits:** The Aid & Attendance benefit from the Veteran's Administration can help a veteran and their surviving spouse finance the cost of senior care. There are conditions that must be met, but it is worth applying for if your loved one is a veteran or the surviving spouse of a veteran. Current benefits can be as much as \$2,127 per month for a married veteran, and \$1,153 per month for a surviving spouse.
- **Reverse mortgage:** This option can be helpful when one spouse needs memory care, but the other one wants to remain in their home. A reverse mortgage allows the family to access the home's equity without giving up the house while one of the owners is still living there.

If you have questions about financing options, the staff at the memory care community you are considering can likely answer them. They often have partnerships with aging services experts who can help you learn more about potential funding solutions. Ready to learn more about memory care in central and south Florida?

Serenades by Sonata Senior Living

Serenades Memory Care Assisted Living by Sonata has Seven convenient locations across central Florida:

- ***Serenades at Longwood***
- ***Serenades at West Orange***
- ***Serenades at The Villages***
- ***Sonata at Boynton Beach***
- ***Sonata at Delray Beach***
- ***Sonata at Boca Raton***
- ***Sonata at Coconut Creek***

Each of these vibrant memory care communities offers a homelike environment built on a philosophy of care designed to enhance the lives of adults with memory loss.

Serenades Memory Care staff members combine renowned dementia care expert Teepa Snow's Positive Approach™ to Care with the Sonata Senior Living Live It Up!SM programming. This means residents live meaningful days that are filled with purpose and accomplishment.

Our At Your ServiceSM teams boost each resident's physical, emotional, and mental well-being every day. From nutritious, engaging dining experiences to quality life enrichment activities to our five-star personal care support, we invite you to schedule a personal tour to learn more about Serenades by Sonata Senior Living today.

