

# Adjusting to Long-Term Care

## Objective

To adjust to the transition to long-term care by taking steps to reduce uncertainty and anxiety.

## What to Know

Moving to a long-term care community can come with mixed emotions, uncertainty, fear, and reluctance to change. You may feel like you have lost your independence, life role, or peer support. The move to a long-term care facility may worsen the impact of recent changes or losses you have experienced. Become involved in the decision making as much as possible, talk openly about the move, and express your feelings about all the changes with loved ones.

Prepare for the transition and increase your comfort with the process before you move in by:

- visiting the community as many times as you can.
- talking to the residents and attempting to make some new friends before you move in.
- understanding where everything is in the community.
- seeing if it is possible to participate in recreational activities prior to move-in.

Once you move to the new community, here are some suggestions.

**1. Personalize your room to make it feel like home.** Set up your room before you officially move in. This will reduce the stress of moving day and help you settle in and feel more comfortable. Include some of the following items:

- **Furniture** – ask someone to measure the room beforehand to see which pieces of furniture you can bring.
- **Bedspreads, pillows, rugs, or curtains** – bring these items from home if you have certain blankets or quilts you prefer to use. These items will make your space feel homier.
- **Robes and comfortable clothes** – if you enjoy lounging in a robe or comfortable pajamas and slippers, pack them so you have easy access to them right away.
- **Decorations and pictures** – do you collect anything, or enjoy a specific theme? Try to incorporate these items as much as possible. If you like photographs or artwork hung on the walls, hang some up.
- **Photo albums** – if you begin to miss home, it can help to look at old photo albums.

**2. Build friendships.** Feeling at home does not always involve material things. Home can be a “feeling,” where your friends and family are. While loved ones may visit often, living in a long-term care community affords you the chance to make new friends and build new relationships. Talk to neighboring residents and leave your door open. This shows you want to talk and are happy to have company. Making friends reduces the likelihood of becoming socially isolated and lonely – decreasing the chances of becoming depressed or experiencing the associated health problems.

**3. Get to know the staff.** Some of the first people you will meet in the long-term care community are the staff that will be caring for you. Get to know the team and let them get to know you. Try to build trusting and open relationships with them.

**4. Get involved in activities.** Even if you have not made many friends, check the events calendar. Your community probably offers activities and programs you may be interested in.

**5. Give it time.** It may take between three and six months for you to adjust to your new home. It might be quicker, or it may take longer. Focus on the reasons you made the decision (safety, health reasons, security). This will help you move through rough patches.

**5. Acknowledge the difficulties.** Talk about your fears and concerns. A social worker or counselor can help you get through the transition.

## What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

What are your biggest fears about moving to a long-term care facility?

---

---

---

The best way to approach the move is to break tasks down into steps. Ask a loved one to assist you in completing the following checklist. Check off each step once it is completed.

### I. Planning for Healthcare Needs

\_\_\_\_ **Make an appointment with your primary care physician.** Once you sign a contract, visit your primary care physician. Get a physical checkup, obtain copies of your medical records, and speak with your doctor about the upcoming move. Bring any paperwork your community needs filled out and signed by a doctor, including an updated medication list with directions. Plan appointments and follow-ups before your move.

\_\_\_\_ **Organize medications.** Check with your community to see if they accept bottled medication. If so, fill prescriptions ahead of time and provide them to the community nursing staff upon move-in. If they do not, you will probably need to go through your community's pharmacy. Get required forms from your doctor. Through medication management, your prescriptions will be administered by the nursing staff.

\_\_\_\_ **Plan for other health and medical needs.** Find specialists such as eye doctors, dentists, or anyone else you will need to see near your new home.

### II. Find a Moving Company

\_\_\_\_ **Ask your community for moving company recommendations.** Your assisted living community likely has a list of recommended moving companies.

\_\_\_ **Get estimates.** Understand the full scope of the moving company’s contract—what is included and what costs extra.

\_\_\_ **Read online reviews.** Read real customers’ reviews about their experiences and decide whether a company is right for you.

\_\_\_ **Make sure the company you choose is available on your planned move-in date.** You do not want to get to the late stages of your move and discover all the company’s trucks are booked on your moving day.

\_\_\_ **Make sure the moving company is properly licensed and insured in both the state you are moving from and, if applicable, the state you are moving to.** To avoid problems, ask when deciding which company you will use.

\_\_\_ **Make sure the company can move heavy or specialty items.** If you have very heavy furniture or a hospital bed, make sure the company can move these items.

### III. Packing Tips

Approach packing in an efficient and organized manner to reduce the stress of moving and make the process less overwhelming.

\_\_\_ **Consider hiring a senior living moving specialist.** This person can help with the entire move from start to finish. They can even help set up an estate sale, donations, and find long-term storage.

\_\_\_ **Prioritize the most important items.** Make a list of essential items like toiletries, medication, clothing, bedding, and furniture. Then, itemize books, crafts, knitting sets, or any other forms of entertainment. If your room has a kitchen, pack pots, pans, and dishes.

\_\_\_ **Label furniture that needs to be moved.** Designate what needs to be moved, put in storage, sold or donated, and thrown away.

\_\_\_ **Store family heirlooms and expensive jewelry in a safe place.** Give expensive items to a family member, or store in a safety deposit box.

### IV. Logistical Items

\_\_\_ **Set up mail forwarding with the U.S. Postal Service.** Use the USPS’s [online tool](#) or fill out the form at your local post office. If your community can collect mail before the move-in date, set your mail forwarding to begin a week ahead of the move. Ask the community’s front desk or concierge to hold mail or packages until your move-in date.

\_\_\_ **Cancel current utility services.** Schedule cancellations for right after the move.

\_\_\_ **Inform all necessary parties about your change of address.** Make a list of all people or companies that have your old address on file and contact them to provide the updated community address. Examples might include creditors, insurance companies, banks, healthcare providers, lawyers, subscription services, shopping websites, and the Social Security Administration.

\_\_\_\_ **Plan end of life details.** While it can be unpleasant to consider, plan end of life details such as estate planning, living will, DNR orders (which must be signed by a doctor), and power of attorney designation. Provide your community a copy of this information.

## V. Final Details

Check these items off your list within a week of your move-in date.

\_\_\_\_ **Confirm with the community that all paperwork has been signed and received.** Call your community and confirm that everything is all set, offering you peace of mind while sparing you the hassle of filling out last-minute forms.

\_\_\_\_ **Identify how you will stay in touch with loved ones.** Will you be using a landline at your new community? Do you have a cell phone, or will you be purchasing one? Plan how you will stay in contact with your loved ones and make sure this is understood by everyone.

\_\_\_\_ **Get an emergency pendant.** If you have mobility issues or are at risk of falling, it is essential to have an emergency pendant. That way, if you fall and no one is around, you can contact emergency services. Check with your community to see if they offer pendants or purchase one from an outside company.

\_\_\_\_ **Ask your community for gate codes so others can gain access.** If your community is part of a larger residential retirement community, there may be a gate to gain access. There may be codes designated for friends, moving companies, and family. Store them in your phone or somewhere you will not lose them.

Once you complete the checklist, you may find your uncertainty or fear about your transition to long-term care is reduced. Is there anything else you (or your family) can do to make the transition a smooth one?

---

---

---

## Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? \_\_\_\_\_

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Did this activity help adjust you adjust to the transition to long-term care? Why or why not?

---

---

---

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

---

---

---