

What to Look for When Choosing a Memory Care Community



If you have questions about how to go about finding a lasting, high-quality care solution for a loved one with dementia, start right here, as we provide honest insights and no fewer than 9, lifestyle- and care-related takeaways that will help you distinguish the best from the rest when it comes to Memory Care providers.

What Is Memory Care?

Memory Care is a specialized, long-term care option designed to meet the needs of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease, related dementias, or other types of memory changes. It differs from traditional Assisted Living, although many Assisted Living communities do provide Memory Care within a separate wing or floor of the community. Families may also choose a singularly focused Memory Care community.

Due to the specialized, 24-hour care requirements, care costs are generally higher for Memory Care, whether the community is singularly focused, or if the Memory Care neighborhood is part of a larger Assisted Living community.

As we’ll explore in just a moment, affordability, specialized lifestyle and care programming, and a provider’s communication protocols with seniors and families are among the important factors to consider when selecting a Memory Care solution for a loved one.

Why Families Shouldn’t Go It Alone

If you’re currently managing a loved one’s care on your own, then you understand the demands and the level of commitment that’s required. And it’s likely, whether consciously or subconsciously, that you realize that it’s probably not the best way forward long term. Finding what is, however, can be a challenge, and all the more when considering that this is an emotional chapter of life for families.

We understand; and want to assure you that the path to finding the right Memory Care solution for a loved one starts simply by recognizing that you’re not alone.



Assembling the right team around you is crucial in so many life endeavors, and this is no different. In fact, when you see the real, human benefits and experience the difference for yourself, the value of the professional Memory Care setting will become clear.

You'll see it in the wider and more frequent smiles from your loved one, and in the heightened engagement with purpose-designed activities and enrichment programming. You'll also see it more in the measured communication and effective interactions with care professionals.

But perhaps just as notably, you yourself will feel liberated from the physical and emotional strain of caretaking. You'll have more time to socialize and practice proper self-care. And you'll feel a sense of pride and satisfaction, knowing you acted in the very best interests of your entire family.

That all starts when you partner with a compassionate, highly qualified Memory Care provider. So perhaps above all else, start today by recognizing that you don't have to go it alone, and select not just a care provider, but a worthwhile partner your family can trust. Now, let's discuss how to go about finding one!

Navigating the Search for a Memory Care Provider

Given the multitude of community and care options, and of course, the varying needs of each individual to consider, being well-informed and purposeful in your approach to finding care is a family's best asset.

We see it all too often that while struggling under the weight of this emotional decision, too many families hesitate, or even worse, they never do decide on a proper Memory Care solution for their loved ones. With that, avoiding common pitfalls and making a confident choice can help *unlock a vastly improved way of life for not just senior loved ones, but for the entire family.*

When searching for the right Memory Care solution for a loved one, it's a good idea to start by compiling a list of questions pertaining to concerns about care, comfort, safety and (of course) cost.

In all, examining the answers to these questions can be most beneficial when choosing the best care solution for a loved one with dementia.



Questions to Ask Before Choosing a Memory Care Community

1. Is the Provider Licensed by the State to Operate a Memory Care Community?

Most states have specific guidelines and require special licenses to administer Memory Care services. As a cardinal rule, ensure that any prospective community is fully licensed and in good standing with all federal, state and/or local governing bodies. Inquire about licensing and certifications while visiting the community or as you first begin communicating with a representative, and for peace of mind and an added layer of protection, go online and visit state, local or federal departments of health and/or senior services, where lists of licensed communities tend to be readily available.

2. Do They Offer Care and Programming that Meet the Specific Needs of Your Loved One?

Given the care-focused nature of traditional Memory Care settings, it's likely that all will provide ample assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs), clothing selection and dressing, bathing and personal care, continence and medication management, dining and ambulation, and the like. However, with dementia including Alzheimer's being progressive in nature, it's crucial that a prospective community also be able and willing to cater accordingly to seniors in different stages of illness.

Naturally, more severe and/or persistent symptoms will necessitate a more guided approach, while select seniors—perhaps those in earlier-onset stages—might enjoy and benefit more from activities that empower independence and stimulate their minds and senses as much as possible (but within reason, of course).

From word and number games, cards and dice, music, movies, and much more, communities should be judged according to their ability to provide both care and programming that's well-suited for each individual. For families in the discovery phases, start by realistically assessing a loved one's needs, likes and capabilities, and ask pointed questions to prospective memory care providers, things like:

1. Are care plans personalized based upon the needs and preferences of each individual?
2. Will staffing and available care services be sufficient in meeting a loved one's daily needs and demands (personal and medical care, etc.)?
3. Does the community offer a range of scheduled activities, including options that will provide fun and engagement for loved ones given the nature and severity of their condition?

It's likely that a common theme—the need for deeper personalization of care and service—has become evident, and for good reason. This, in fact, is perhaps the single, most important factor to consider when choosing a Memory Care solution for a loved one.

3. Do They Have Any Specialized or Accredited Programming or Care Methods?

Quite simply, what sets a particular Memory Care community apart from others? At a time when seniors and families have many choices when it comes to Memory Care, the best options will always have some kind of edge or advantage over the rest. Perhaps it's price or a particular comfort or convenience factor. For The Peaks at Old Laramie Trail Senior Living Memory Care communities, it's our person-centered approach to care.

Person-centered care for individuals with dementia honors cultural and spiritual preferences, providing meaningful and engaging activities, making well-being a priority, and improving the quality of the relationships between the health care provider and the individual with dementia. For those reasons and others, The Peaks at Old Laramie Trail Senior Living believes the person-centered approach is the best way forward for seniors and families.

In total, those searching should look for a comprehensive care solution that follows the person-centered approach that's recommended by the Alzheimer's Association® and other leading dementia care organizations. Early studies have indicated that person-centered Memory Care achieves better results, including reducing agitation, improving symptoms, fighting depression and improving overall quality of life in individuals¹.



4. Do Team Members Receive Specialized Dementia Training?

Communities that provide specialized dementia training for care personnel and team members will likely be more appealing than those that don't. However, it's important to investigate and ask for more detailed information about applicable training programs to gauge the true value added.

Some questions to ask:

1. Does training meet local, state or other established regulations?
2. Is training continuous (versus one-time) in nature?
3. What is the intent of the training?
4. What methodologies does the training utilize to help care providers increase proficiency and develop, refine and cultivate new skills?

¹Kim & Park, 2017



5. How Do Care Professionals Communicate with Families About Loved Ones' Care and Well-Being?

It may go without saying, but communication is the hallmark of a successful care partnership, and for families searching for the right partner in care for a loved one with dementia, it will pay to choose one with a robust and effective communication structure and protocols.

Today especially, there's a real propensity and genuine desire by families to remain actively involved in a loved ones' life and continuing care, even as they enter a formal, long-term care setting. For perspective, just consider the reported 11 million² individuals and families who currently provide (unpaid) care for a loved one with Alzheimer's or other dementia. With that, a community's ability and willingness to function as the family's partner in care is a crucial consideration as family members may also serve as an important communication bridge between their loved one and outside care providers like doctors or other specialists.

When asking about communication during the discovery process, worthwhile questions might include:

1. Prior to move in, how does the community gather utilize information about incoming residents (clinical diagnosis, medical history, life story and family history, likes and preferences, etc.)?
2. Day-to-day, how does the community provide updates and information, like capturing and photos, videos and memories, and interface with families regarding their loved one's wellness and continuing care?
3. Will family members (under normal circumstances) be able to touch base with care team members for routine updates? Additionally, are members of the leadership team readily available to family members?
4. When are regularly scheduled touchpoints (weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.) where the community and family members join together to assess an individual's current condition and ensure alignment regarding the future course of care?
5. Does the community offer support groups and other services for family members?

The advent of digital technology can help revolutionize communication between families and care providers along with productive, in-person visits, can make for a successful combination. Families should demand that any, prospective Memory Care community have an efficient and well-documented communication protocol that allows an appropriate level of involvement in a loved one's care planning.

² Source: Alzheimer's Association

6. Is the Community a Safe and Secure Environment for People with Dementia?

Purpose-built Memory Care communities have integrated features designed for ease of navigation, reducing confusion, promoting safety and security 24 hours a day, and improving quality of life overall. When touring prospective communities, look for aesthetic beauty and cleanliness, of course, as well as safety, comfort and security features.

One lesser-known factor to give ample attention would be lighting, as a recent study by the Alzheimer's Research Foundation at The Rockefeller University found that people with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia that have regular exposure to natural light or to the bright daytime light, have significantly improved sleep quality. This new study suggests that light therapy, or even spending more time outdoors in sunlight, may have benefits including decreasing symptoms of depression and reducing agitation in people with Alzheimer's and other dementia³.

Other safety, comfort and security features might include:

1. Secured doors, windows and outdoor spaces
2. Natural and/or smart lighting for setting/re-setting sleep patterns and properly illuminating halls and residences any time of day or night
3. Square or simplified hallway configuration designed for easier wayfinding and better accommodating residents who may wander
4. Directional signage and/or points of reference
5. Soft, dementia-friendly wall colors that appear more inviting and soothing
6. Engagement tools like life stations, sensory walls, boxes or tactile artwork
7. Customizable entryways for added familiarity
8. Musical elements for imparting calm and signaling time for events like meals and activities

7. Does the Community Offer Specialized Dining Options and Programming?

As dining can present unique challenges for people with dementia, it's important that communities provide evidence-based solutions. Those may begin with offering multiple, resident-friendly entrée options, anytime menus, finger food choices, hydration programs, etc.

Music, consistent seating patterns and team member training are also important factors to discuss with prospective Memory Care communities, with the goal being to ensure enjoyment and ample support with regards to dining, yet still enable independence, if and wherever possible.

8. Are the Accommodations Desirable and Suitable Considering the Needs and Care Requirements of the Individual?

Of course, individual needs and preferences will vary, but it's important to ensure that prospective Memory Care communities offer accommodations that fit individual and family expectations for size, privacy, comfort, practicality, safety and other considerations.

Consider in advance what a most desirable living solution would look like, be it a private or semi-private room, a suite or more well-appointed apartment home, and which features would ensure the highest level of comfort and care for the individual and family. For many, non-negotiables might include more general items like privacy, 24-hour care and service, and 24-hour security. More specific requirements may entail offerings like specialized dining, robust activities and engagement programming, attending or on-call physician availability, in-house physical, occupational and/or speech therapy, or myriad other things, depending on personal needs and preferences.

The important point to consider is that because there are typically many choices when it comes to local Memory Care providers, seniors and families can be a bit demanding, and won't have to "settle" for lesser accommodations that don't fulfill (at least) the bulk of their wish list for features and available services. That's an important advantage that can (and perhaps should) impact expectations from the beginning.

9. How Can the Community Assist Resident Seniors to Receive Physician and Third-Party Medical Provider Services?

To ensure proper care and timely medical attention (when needed), selecting a community that provides complimentary, scheduled transportation to medical centers, doctors' appointments, etc. can be a prudent choice. Some communities also offer available, on-site physician services, and some may also partner with home health and hospice providers for eligible services as needed. In the absence of transportation services, it's possible that may be enough to satisfy the needs of some seniors and families.

Either way, investigating these options in advance is recommended because it helps ensure that all of a loved one's critical needs (food, personal and medical care, etc.) can be met by a prospective community...even if those needs call for venturing beyond the walls and common areas of that community.

That's perfect for creating much-needed peace of mind and making more confident choices, knowing that the community can "cover all the bases" on the family's and loved one's behalf.



Making an Informed Decision

Using the insights and guidance contained here, you're hopefully that much better-prepared to conduct an efficient and well-informed search, and to select with confidence a Memory Care provider and solution that's right for you and your loved one. This information, however, is only good when put into real practice, so be sure to start reaching out, and don't delay! Make a call and start working with community representatives in and around your local area.

The Memory Care universe as a whole is a warm and welcoming setting that's built upon a foundation of kindness, service and compassion. Knowledgeable professionals are out there to lend a steady hand to seniors and families who are trying to navigate a most challenging time.

Therefore, if one, final point can stick with you, make it this: **It's a safe space for families out here, and one that's typically free from traditional sales pressure and "hard sells."**

Instead, what you're likely to find are dedicated and kind-hearted professionals who are eager and willing to lend guidance and support to family members, or just offer an ear to listen whenever you need it.

The first step is simply overcoming initial fears and starting the conversation with a qualified professional who can help. Please, start today, right now, and make the connections you need to put this information to good use and find the partner in care that your family and loved one needs.

The right Memory Care solution is out there. Please let us know how we can help!

Questions to ask on your tour

Print and take with you

Community: _____ **Date:** _____

Contact: _____

GENERAL

1. Are you licensed by the state to operate a Memory Care community?
2. What is the monthly rate for housing and care? What services does that rate include? (cable TV, phone, medication fees, levels of care costs, activities/outings, transportation)?

RECREATION/ACTIVITIES

1. Do you offer a range of scheduled daily activities?
2. Are there scheduled activities every day of the week?
3. Are residents grouped by cognitive level?
4. Do you charge for outside activities (lunch outings, museums, etc.)?

DINING

1. What meals are provided? Are special dietary requests, such as kosher meals, accommodated?
2. How are meals served?
3. Are team members available at meals in case my loved one needs help eating?
4. Do you offer and specialized dining options or programs?
5. Can I bring food/meals to my loved one?
6. Can I join my loved one for lunch/dinner?

APARTMENTS/VISITING

1. How often are housekeeping and laundry service provided?
2. Do you have semi-private or private rooms or both?
3. If you have shared rooms, how are roommates chosen?

4. Are there specific visiting hours?
5. How long can guests stay?
6. How many guests can visit at one time?
7. Do you offer overnight stays for family members?
8. Are pets allowed?

CARE

1. Does each resident have an individual care plan?
2. How are care plans developed?
3. Who is involved in developing a resident's care plan?
4. How often are care plans evaluated?
5. Do you accommodate special care needs, such as diabetic care, mobility issues, physical aggressiveness or wandering?
6. What is your staffing ratio for each shift?
7. Are there RNs or LPNs on staff? If so, how many? Are they on-site 24/7?
8. What medical services are available on-site?
 - a. Physical Therapy
 - b. Occupational Therapy
 - c. Speech Therapy
 - d. Home Health
 - e. Hospice
 - f. Podiatry
 - g. Medication Management
9. Can my loved one keep their original doctor?
10. Will a team member go with my loved one to doctors/ER visits?
11. What types of care can your community NOT provide?
12. What is the policy for a medical emergency/ER visit?
13. If there is an emergency, what is the policy for notifying family members?
14. What is the discharge policy?
15. Can my loved one return to the community if they require outside rehab?
16. What happens if my loved one is no longer ambulatory?
17. Can my loved one stay here through the end of life or do they have to move if their care becomes too extensive?

TRAINING

1. What sort of training do your team members have?
2. Does this training meet local, state or other, established regulations?
3. Is training continuous (versus one-time) in nature?
4. Are any staff members certified dementia care managers (CDCMs)?
5. Do you hold any additional local, state and/or industry certifications?
6. What type of dementia techniques do staff use?
7. Will my loved one be assigned to the same staff members every day?
8. How do staff members care for residents who are physically aggressive or those who exhibit disruptive behaviors?

COMMUNICATION

1. How often do you communicate with the family about their loved one's care?
2. Which team members are responsible for that communication?
3. How do these meetings take place (phone, email, in-person care meetings)?
4. As part of in-person visits, will I (under normal circumstances) be able to touch base with care team members for routine updates?
5. Are members of your leadership team readily available to family members?
6. Does the community offer support groups and other services for family members?

SAFETY

1. How are doors, windows and outdoor spaces secured?
2. What sort of lighting do you use (natural, smart lighting)?
3. What is the layout of the community (square or simplified hallway configuration)?
4. Is there any directional signage and/or points of reference?
5. Are there life stations, sensory walls/boxes and interactive, 3D or tactile artwork?

NOTES: _____

