

## **Assisted Living**

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Assisted living refers to long-term residences for older adults who need extra support and care in activities of daily living while also allowing for some personal autonomy, independence, and privacy. There are around 31,000 assisted living communities in the United States presently, with around one million Americans occupying these facilities. With the older adult population constantly growing, this statistic is predicted to double by 2030. As the elderly population increases, the likelihood for disability and need for long-term care facilities also increases. Many older adults who live in assisted living facilities have either a functional difficulty in their ability to live independently, or a disability which requires the extra help provided by assisted living facilities.

Services typically offered in assisted living facilities are 24-hour supervision, provision of meals, medication management, transportation, help with bathing and dressing, housekeeping and laundry, health and exercise programs, and social activities to encourage connections among residents. While these are typically offered, assisted living facilities do provide different levels of care. Some facilities provide lighter care for individuals who may only need help with one or two activities, whereas others may provide more in-depth care for individuals who are bedridden. One question that arises focuses on the differences between nursing homes and assisted living, as they provide similar care. One study by Zimmerman et al. (2003) honed in on answering this question, finding that nursing homes often offered more health services than assisted living facilities, but consequently had less privacy for residents. Moreover, nursing homes also have

registered nurses on duty at all times as well to accommodate for the medical needs of the residents.

While assisted living facilities offer several services for their residents, one major area outside of services provided that deserves consideration is quality of living. Within any community, social interaction and health conditions are important in assuring a high quality of living for residents. Many potential residents and family members often wonder what quality of life and care will be when living in an assisted living facility. Social support has been shown to decrease the impact of stressful events, prevent social isolation, and decrease the likelihood of developing depressive symptoms. Moreover, promotion of autonomy and independence within these facilities often leads to higher life satisfaction, health status, and emotional well-being as many older adults often feel a loss of independence when moving to a facility offering aid.

A study conducted by Mitchell and Kemp (2000) found that residents were satisfied with the privacy, comfort, and cleanliness of their rooms and home. Residents endorsed having high levels of flexibility within their homes, often having many activities to choose from and the ability to choose mealtimes or visitation. Additionally, facilities that had higher cohesive environments, both in promotion of social activities and participation with other residents, endorsed higher levels of satisfaction and lower depression scores. Outside of these areas, residents found they had higher life satisfaction if they maintained familial relationships outside of the assisted living facility, and often had a lower subjective life satisfaction if they were living with several chronic health conditions. With residents who have dementia, facilities that trained staff on areas of care pertinent to dementia populations and encouraged social activity participation were found to provide a better quality of life.

A newer area of care is emerging in the form of ambient assisted living, which utilizes technology to improve quality of life and safety of residents. One example of this may be utilizing GPS in order to avoid wandering in residents with dementia, or communication technology that helps residents maintain contact with their families. Other areas of technology have been shown to help residents manage medical conditions such as setting off medical alarms, monitoring blood pressure, and alerting changes in health status. Ambient assisted living helps older adults monitor eating habits, provide guidance on nutrition, and manage medication. While this is still a newer concept in assisted living, use of these technologies will continue to improve life of seniors living in these residences.

### **Further Reading**

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