

[FOR FAMILIES](#) > [TIPS ON CHOOSING A RETIREMENT COMMUNITY](#)

Whether searching for yourself or for an older family member, finding the right retirement community is one of the most important decisions you can make. What makes it especially challenging is that every community is unique. They vary by location, size, price, building amenities, programs, and services. Just as important, the mix of staff and residents also contributes a great deal to the "personality" of each community.

We recommend you do your homework. Visit several options and go prepared with a list of questions. Take the time you need to get a "feel" for any community you consider. Make notes and ask lots of questions. Observe how staff interacts with the residents. Speak to the residents themselves about their perceptions of their community. If they are available, ask family members of residents what their feelings and impressions are. Make several visits, at various times of the day. And most importantly, if you are seeking a retirement community for someone who cannot visit the residence personally, *it is crucial to respect their needs and wishes by including them in the process as much as possible.*

As you start your search, it is very important to assess both your *current* needs and also to consider *how they may change through time*. This is often difficult, but it is important. The searching, relocating, and transition process is stressful on everyone. The loss of familiar surroundings, routines, neighbours, friends, and care providers is particularly difficult for the older adult involved. Ask each community *how they accommodate changes in health status*, whether those changes may be temporary or long term. It is also important to examine your finances and ask about costs. Ask for written materials that discuss features, services and financial charges. Make sure you have a complete understanding of the residency agreement, particularly what services are included and what, if any, are not. Ask how rate increases are handled. Ask for copies of menus, activity calendars, and newsletters. Ask to watch activities. Are they well attended? Does the staff seem to be enjoying the activity as well? Be as informed as you can.

Finally, trust your instincts. As you tour a community, try to imagine you or your loved one living there and being comfortable. Did you feel at ease while touring? Was the staff friendly and inviting? *Follow your instincts and your heart.* Ask to stay for a meal or consider a "trial stay" to really develop a "feel" for the place.

To help you in this important decision, listed below are some helpful hints on what to look for when evaluating all retirement communities. To help you in this important decision, listed below are some helpful hints on what to look for when evaluating all retirement communities. It is based on insights from the Ontario Retirement Communities Association (ORCA) and various other reference sources. ORCA is a non-profit and self-regulating organization, with voluntary membership, that over the last 25 years has focused its attention on ensuring that retirement home residents receive high quality services. The Gardens of Peterborough are proud to be members of ORCA. Each of our retirement communities has received ORCA's highest accreditation rating. You may want to use it as a checklist as you consider your various retirement options. It should help you be an educated consumer. You may want to use it as a checklist as you consider your options. It should help you be an educated consumer.

Atmosphere

- As you arrive at the residence, do you like its location and outward appearance?
- As you enter the lobby and tour the residence, is the decor attractive and homelike?
- Did you receive a warm greeting from the staff welcoming you to the residence?
- Do staff call residents by name and interact warmly with them?
- Do residents socialize with each other and appear happy and comfortable?
- Are staff appropriately dressed, personable and professional?
- Are the staff members you pass during your tour friendly to you?
- Are visits with the resident welcome at any time?

Physical Features

- Is the community well designed for residents' needs? Are there plenty of common areas and features of interest?
- Does the residence have good natural and artificial lighting?
- Are there appropriate fire safety features and procedures in place? What about security?
- Is the residence clean, free of odors, and appropriately heated/cooled?
- Are hand-rails available to aid in walking and are floors of a non-skid material?
- Are carpets firm to ease walking?
- Is parking available for residents who own cars?
- Does this residence have an emergency power generator?

Services

- Can the residence provide a list of services available? Do they offer what you are looking for? Are there extra fees or are the services included?
- Is staff able to provide 24-hour assistance with the activities of daily living if needed? (dressing, eating, mobility, hygiene and grooming, bathing, toileting, and laundry)
- Are there procedures to communicate and interact with family members?
- Does the residence provide housekeeping services in residents' units?
- Are laundry services provided? Can residents do their own personal laundry if they wish?
- Are barber or beautician services offered on-site?
- What provisions are there to attend to spiritual needs and interests?

Medication & Health Care

- Does the residence have specific policies regarding medication administration?
- Are there registered nursing staff on-site around the clock?
- How close is the nearest hospital, medical clinic, or dentist office?
- Are doctor's clinics available on-site?
- Are pharmacy services offered on-site?
- Does staff coordinate home care visits from physical therapists, occupational therapists, etc.?
- Are services available to assist residents who experience memory or orientation losses?
- Does the residence have a clearly stated procedure for responding to a medical emergency?

Needs Assessments, Contracts, & Finances

- When may a contract be terminated and what are the refund policies?
- Are additional services available if the resident's needs change? What are the fees?
- Is there a procedure to pay for additional services if they are needed on a temporary basis?
- Do billing and payment policies seem fair and reasonable?

Individual Unit Features

- Are different sizes and types of suites available?
- Do residents have their own lockable doors?
- Is a 24-hour emergency response system accessible in each room?
- Are bathrooms private, with handicapped accommodations for wheelchairs and walkers?
- Is heating individually controlled in the suite? Is there air-conditioning?
- Are residents able to bring their own furnishings and what may they bring?
- Do all suites have a telephone and cable TV, and how is billing handled?
- Is a kitchen area provided with a refrigerator, sink and cooking appliance?
- Are there accommodations to facilitate family visits?

Social & Recreational Activities

- Is there evidence of an organized activities program, such as a posted daily schedule, events in progress, reading materials, visitors, etc.?
- Do residents participate in activities outside of the residence in the neighboring community?
- Do volunteers come into the residence to help with or conduct programs?
- Are family members welcome to participate in activities and events?
- How are resident needs and desires for privacy accommodated in the recreational program?
- Are residents' pets allowed in the residence? Who is responsible for their care?

Food Service

- Does the residence provide three nutritionally balanced meals a day?
- Is the menu varied and interesting? May a resident request special foods?
- Are snacks available?
- Are the dining facilities pleasant, clean, and well maintained?
- Are private dining areas available?
- How are special nutritional needs accommodated?
- May residents eat meals in their suites? Is tray service available?
- Are Food Services staff pleasant and well trained? How is the service?
- How are meals scheduled? Is there flexibility?
- Are family meals and guests easily accommodated? What are the charges?