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Choosing Home Care Services That Meet Your Needs

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Making the decision to hire a [home care service](#) to provide care for your loved one is an important decision and can, at the same time, be very difficult. If an illness or recovery from surgery requires nursing care or physical therapy, a physician may order skilled home care services that provide both skilled providers and personal aides. Your decision is then based on the obvious medical determinations made by the doctor. But what if you as the family caregiver must determine the extent of care needed without the help of a doctor?

Each home care situation is unique. In the beginning, family or friends step in to help with simple tasks and support for aging seniors who want to stay in their homes. As long term care needs progress, more time is required to manage those needs. Physical and mental conditions change with aging making usually routine hygiene and daily living activities difficult for an aging individual. Even with the healthiest of seniors, the ability to drive a car, shop for groceries or do general housekeeping eventually needs to be relinquished to the responsibility of another person.

In one example, Karen, would stop by her parents' home on her way to work every morning and again on her way home from work in the evening. She checked in the morning to see that they were up and ready for the day and Karen would take a shopping list for things they needed. In the evening she delivered the needed items she had purchased during her lunch break and sometimes she fixed a meal when one was not prepared by her mother. This worked well until Karen began to notice her father did not shave or dress during the day and both parents were forgetting their medications. Karen felt more time and supervision was needed in their care but with her own family and job, she could not do it. Non-medical or personal home care services would be a good option for Karen to consider.

Before starting your search for a non-medical or personal home care company, determine what the care needs are and how much time each week will be required for assistance from the company. You may want to consult with the family physician and other family members as well as experienced social workers or care managers to determine needs. Most home care companies, as well, will help you do an assessment at no charge. With your care needs in hand, you are ready to begin your search.

The National Association for Home Care & Hospice (<http://www.nahc.org/home.html>) gives the following guidelines and checklist in searching for a home care company.

- How long has this provider been serving the community?
- Does this provider supply literature explaining its services, eligibility requirements, fees, and funding sources? Many providers furnish their home care clients with a detailed "Patient Bill of Rights" that outlines the rights and responsibilities of the providers, clients, and family caregivers alike.
- How does this provider select and train its employees? Does it protect its workers with written personnel policies and malpractice insurance? Does it protect clients from theft or abuse by bonding its employees?
- Does this provider assign supervisors to oversee the quality of care clients are receiving in their homes? If so, how often do these individuals make visits? Who can the client and his or her family members call with questions or complaints? How does the company follow up on and resolve problems?
- What are the financial procedures of this provider? Does the provider furnish written statements explaining all of the costs and payment plan options associated with home care?
- What procedures does this provider have in place to handle emergencies? Are its caregivers available on notice?
- How does this provider ensure client confidentiality?

If a home care company has not previously been recommended to you, ask for a list of previous clients and call for their experience with this provider.

Following up on these guidelines can help you determine the quality of personal care that is given. Many states license non-medical home care companies and require both legal and health

standards to be maintained.

Read about individual [home care companies in your area](#) on the National Care Planning Council's website www.longtermcarelink.net.