

Choosing an adult day center

Adult day centers are designed to meet the needs of individuals living with Alzheimer's or other dementias and to support the person's strengths, abilities and independence. They offer opportunities to be social and to participate in activities in a safe environment. Adult day centers also give caregivers a break from caregiving. While the person living with dementia is at a center, the caregiver will have time to rest, run errands or finish other tasks.

Getting started.

Adult day centers can vary. Consult a variety of sources to find a center that is suitable for people living with dementia. Plan a visit to observe and ask questions. While visiting, notice if individuals are engaged in activities and if staff members treat each person as an individual with unique needs.

Keep an open mind. You may first want to visit without the person living with dementia, then visit together for lunch or an activity. Consider using its services at least twice a week for a month before making a final decision. While some people may resist going to the center at first, they often look forward to the visit after several weeks of attending, meeting people and joining in activities. If the adult day center does not seem to be working out, consider reintroducing it again after some time.

Questions to ask.

When choosing an adult day center, there are a number of factors to consider, including the staff, environment, programs and type of services available. The following list of questions may be helpful when checking out a day center:

- **Center clients.**
 - Does the center provide services for people with different types of impairments as well as those in good physical health?
 - Does the center provide specific services for individuals living with dementia?
- **Assessment.**
 - Will the center evaluate the person's needs, interests and abilities?
 - How will this evaluation be accomplished and how often will it be repeated?
 - Will medical needs, social and family history, cognitive functioning and social skills be assessed?

Programs and services.

Be sure the center offers the programs and services that you and the person with dementia need. The following are some of the specific services you may want to investigate. Keep in mind that few adult day programs offer all of the services described below, and not all of the services are necessary for a program to be of high quality.

- **Activities.**
 - Does the center offer activities that the person can participate in and enjoy?
 - Are people living with dementia separate from other participants or included in general activities?
 - Are participants involved in suggesting activities?
 - Is the schedule flexible and based on needs and interests?
- **Personal care.**
 - Will the center's staff help with grooming, toileting, eating, showering and other personal care tasks?
- **Nutrition.**
 - Does the center provide nutritious meals and snacks? You may want to sample a meal.
 - Can the center accommodate special diets or provide a culturally specific menu?
- **Health services.**
 - Will the center provide blood pressure checks and physical, dental, foot, eye and ear examinations?
 - Will the center dispense medication and/or offer medication reminders?
- **Therapy.**
 - Will the center help arrange needed physical, occupational or speech therapy?
 - Are therapists onsite or on call?
- **Counseling.**
 - Will the center provide support for clients and families? For example, can they offer guidance on outside resources and arrange for supportive care in the home?
- **Special needs.**
 - Is the center equipped to deal with someone who uses a wheelchair, is hearing or visually impaired or is disabled in another way?

- **Operations.**
 - Who is the owner or sponsoring agency?
 - How many years have they been in operation?
 - Does the center have a license, certification or accreditation (if appropriate in that state)?
 - What are the hours of operation?
 - Is there a minimum number of hours required?
 - What are the policies regarding lateness or absence?
- **Cost.**
 - What is the daily cost?
 - What types of payments (e.g., Medicaid, long-term care insurance, military veterans benefits) are accepted?
 - Is there financial aid or a sliding scale rate — where caregivers pay according to ability or income?
 - Are there any additional charges for specific services?
- **Location and transportation.**
 - Is the center easy for you to get to?
 - Does the center offer its own transportation services?
 - Does the center recommend specific transportation providers?
- **Center environment.**
 - What is the overall appearance and quality of the center?
 - Is it warm, inviting and free of clutter?
 - Is there adequate space to accommodate activities for individuals with different needs?
 - Is there space available for outdoor activities?
 - Is the furniture clean and comfortable?
 - Are there secured areas for outside walking?
- **Staff**
 - What are the staff qualifications?
 - What is the staff-to-client ratio?
 - Do staff members have dementia-specific training?
 - Are individuals living with dementia treated with respect and dignity?
 - Does the center have a physician, nurse or health care professional on staff or on call?
 - If the center uses volunteers, are they adequately trained and supervised?
 - Is staff warm and friendly to individuals, family members and caregivers?

It is also important to evaluate your need for adult day services on a regular basis. At some point the person living with dementia may need more care than the center can provide. Center staff and support groups can help evaluate your needs for future care.

For more information, visit alz.org/adulthooddaycenters.

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