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## **Alzheimer's & Dementia for Family Caregivers**

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Understanding dementia and Alzheimer's is the first step in caring for a loved one with the disease. Comfort Keepers of Anoka and White Bear Lake has compiled local information and resources that can be a valuable tool as the disease progresses.

Comfort Keepers

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## Introduction

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Are you or a senior loved one experiencing memory issues? Have they been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia? Are you looking for ways to improve quality of life and deal with the symptoms or behaviors? Comfort Keepers has compiled information on local resources, tools to address difficult behaviors, and general knowledge on Alzheimer's and dementia to help families and seniors dealing with the disease.

Comfort Keepers has been a leading provider of in-home senior care services in the North Metro Twin Cities for over 10 years. During this time, our dedicated staff has acquired extensive knowledge in senior care, disease care, senior health and wellness, safety, and more.

The goal of Comfort Keepers is to support seniors as they age by helping them maintain the best quality of life possible. By educating seniors and their families, looking at options for care, and other important factors, we strive to help seniors bring joy to each day of their lives as well as plan for the future.

# About The Authors.

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Tom Berard and Sam Aisawa have over 20 years of experience in the Senior Care Industry. Both have worked with seniors and their families to help them experience the highest quality of life possible in their golden years.



Tom and Sam come from different backgrounds on their way to helping seniors. Tom has both a business and an engineering degree and has devoted time and energy to developing solutions to improve people's lives. He has received certification in the Society for Senior Advisors Tom believes in strong mentorship and coaching to lead his team so they can continue to bring together passionate like-minded individuals that can improve the quality of life in the place seniors call home.

Sam started with Comfort Keepers part-time as a caregiver and after completing a degree in Health Information Technology, joined our administrative team full-time. Sam's commitment to seniors shines through all of her work. She is a strong lifetime learner and enjoys understanding and implementing new methods and technologies to help seniors and families improve their lives on a daily basis.

"Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. "

**Henri Nouwen**

## Chapter One

# Forgetfulness in Seniors: What is Normal?

Discover what is considered "normal" memory as we age and explore testing options available to determine if there may be a bigger issue.

# Forgetfulness in Seniors: What's Normal?

## Feeling Forgetful?

Forgetfulness is a common aspect of aging, however, our brains can be trained to work more efficiently. It's easy for young people to brush off memory loss, but for a senior, it can feel like the start of a much larger problem. As we age, common and non-



threatening causes hinder our ability to remember. For example, older people often experience a decrease in blood flow to the brain, which may cause gaps in memory. Another common cause is that the body produces lower levels of hormones and proteins that protect and repair brain cells. Neither of these is necessarily a cause for alarm. Everyone, no matter our age, faces some level of forgetfulness. If you're caring for an older adult, you may be worried about changes in his or her memory. Remember, forgetfulness doesn't necessarily indicate that something is wrong.

## What's Normal?

As the brain ages, it is common to forget things. Below are some top examples of forgetfulness. If your loved one's memory issues reflect the behavior described, consider writing them down and talking with their doctor. Something more serious may be going on, but that's not always the case. Research has shown that games can promote brain health, helping to keep the brain sharp at any age.

## Common forgetfulness:

- Occasionally forgetting where they left objects that they use often
- Walking into a room and forgetting why they entered
- Cycling through several family members' names before saying the correct one
- Having the "on the tip of my tongue" sensation
- Occasionally missing an appointment or meeting on their schedule
- Having a harder time retrieving information that they just learned
- Being unable to explain things quickly and with precise details

## Testing

If you are truly concerned there are quite a few options for self-testing as a potential indicator of problems. The [SAGE exam](#) is considered very effective in picking up cognitive issues. Most medical doctors are familiar with this test and can assist with evaluation following its completion. Some examples of the questions provided on the SAGE exam are listed below:

- How many nickels are in 60 cents?
- You are buying \$13.45 of groceries. How much change would you receive back from a \$20 bill?
- Write down the names of 12 different animals.
- Draw a large face of a clock and place in the numbers. Position the hands for 10 minutes after 11 o'clock. On your clock, label "L" for the long hand and "S" for the shorthand.

[Mind Crowd](#) is an online test to see individuals compare to others in their demographic. The test is free and it looks at a number of factors including age, handedness, health, etc. as it analyzes the information. You don't need to disclose your personal information to take the test. The goal of the organization is to get as much data as possible to help find a cure to Alzheimer's. They are using the internet to gather a broad range of data. A simple Google search for online tests will bring up a number of resources.



## **Stimulating the Mind**

Like any other muscle, you can exercise the brain to keep it in shape. A [word scramble](#), [trivia game](#) or [word search](#) can be fun and keep us thinking. There are also excellent interactive resources like [Lumosity](#) that can keep the mind challenged. With Lumosity, not only can you keep the brain stimulated, you can also measure yourself against others in your age bracket. It's recommended that you look for "new" things to try, rather than continue doing the same thing. For instance, instead of playing a card game alone join a group of players and try something more stimulating--including some fun banter! It's better for you and way more fun than solitaire.

## **Social Interaction and Cognitive Function**

Another way for your loved one to stay sharp and happy is to meet new people outside of their usual social circle. Making a new connection is great for seniors' mental health because it provides an outlet for them to share stories and memories that relate to pivotal moments in their life. Reliving these moments and sharing stories with a fresh audience keeps seniors mentally active and helps to bring up positive memories that stimulate the mind.

Researchers give [neurotransmitters](#) the credit for the mental health benefits of socializing. While talking with AARP about this subject, Lou Cozolino, a psychologist and professor of psychology at Pepperdine University, believes that the release of oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin into the brain creates this effect. When a person's brain releases these three neurotransmitters, stress is reduced and it's easier to feel a sense of well-being and contentment.

[Check out our website](#) for additional information and resources on Alzheimer's and dementia!

## Chapter Two

# Dementia Resources

National and local resources is a great place to start when beginning to compile information to care for a loved one with Alzheimer's or another form dementia.

# Dementia Resources

With the infinite amount of information available on the web, it can be difficult to sift through and find helpful, local resources and information as we learn about the disease, how to manage it, and care for ourselves or another who suffers from dementia.



Keeping that in mind, we wanted to provide useful information for individuals through their journey with dementia. Read on for national and local resources as well as some tools and things to consider when dealing with the disease.

## National Resources

While they may host an overwhelming amount of information, National groups and resources can be a great place to start when in the beginning stages of learning about Alzheimer's and dementia.

[Dementia Society of America](#)

[Alzheimer's Association](#)

[Alzheimer's Connected: An online community for those affected by Alzheimer's](#)

[Alzheimer's News Today](#)

[Comfort Keepers: Assisting persons with Alzheimer's](#)

## Support from Minnesota Research Centers

[Health Partners Center for Memory and Aging](#) is an organization that does a lot of research into Alzheimer's, focusing on a variety of ways to help victims of the disease.

At the [Alzheimer's Research Center](#) in St. Paul, Dr. William Frey is studying the treatment of the disease with a mist that crosses into the brain through the blood-brain barrier. Some people refer to Alzheimer's as "diabetes of the brain" and Dr. Frey's research focuses on using insulin in a high enough dose to improve cognition. The initial results were promising, and they are now doing a larger study.

The University of Minnesota hosts an annual conference: [Caring for a Person with Memory Loss](#). This can be a great educational opportunity for anyone caring for someone with dementia at home. Over the 11 years I've owned Comfort Keepers, I have had staff and families attend the annual event. They have always come back very satisfied with the time they spent at the event and what they learned. Dr. Joseph Gaugler sponsors this event and has an email list that you can join with information and updates. [Click here](#) to see his background and his email to request an invitation.

The Mayo Clinic has an [Alzheimer's Disease Research Center](#) that has held unique events in the Twin Cities from time to time. There are many experts that speak at the event along with a learning lab and displays. [Click here](#) for event information and a link to get on their mailing list. Mayo tends to be on the cutting edge of new technology that may be able to help now.

## Dementia Friendly Communities

Minnesota Leads the Way in Active Alzheimer's-Friendly Communities. Minnesota has been a trendsetter for community activities related to Alzheimer's disease. The group [ACT on Alzheimer's](#) served as a model for the White House initiative to deal with community-based dementia issues nationwide. Their primary focus is to help communities become Alzheimer's-friendly places to live. Some of the communities have created unique resources for businesses and citizens while others have focused on awareness. List of dementia-friendly communities

## Memory Cafes Can Provide Much Needed Support

A Memory Cafe is a program for those suffering from Alzheimer's and their families to connect with others going through the same thing. Occasionally people that have early-onset Alzheimer's say they appreciate the opportunity to discuss how the disease is impacting them. [Check out this list](#) of cafes in Minnesota and also find them near you by contacting your county human services department.



## Utilizing Technology as a Resource

As with many things, we often hope to find solutions from our technological world. Although Alzheimer's tends to lend itself to more simple solutions, you will find some additional ideas below.

**Personal Emergency Response Systems** can be helpful for people with Alzheimer's if they have wandering issues. In most cases, there should be someone else in the home to make sure they are being used correctly. Generally, anything that can track a person's whereabouts needs to be charged in order to work and be on their person when they go outside. This can be more challenging than it sounds when working with people with Alzheimer's.

**ID Bracelets** come in many varieties now utilizing technology that can be very helpful for seniors. The information on [this ID bracelet](#) can be scanned by emergency personnel and they can get both a medical history and a home address. The medical history can be vitally important!

**Electronic Companion Pets** can also soothe the mind of someone suffering from Alzheimer's. Animated animals [like these](#) from Ageless Innovations retail for just over \$100. They react to the person holding them by purring, barking, wiggling, rolling over, etc. These types of animations have been known to be quite comforting and worth a try now that they are less expensive.



Whether you are ready to take the next steps in attending support group meetings, getting involved with an organization to combat dementia, or simply want some information and guidance as you cope with the ever-changing disease, remember that you are not alone and that there are resources available to help and educate when you are affected by dementia. Check out [our website](#) for additional information and resources on Alzheimer's and dementia care for yourself or a loved one.

### Chapter Three

# Support and Service Options for Families

Family members faced with the challenge of caring for a loved one with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia have many options available to help.

## **Support and Service Options Available to Help Care for Those With Dementia**

As an organization that has helped to care for seniors and their families for more than 20 years, we at Comfort Keepers® have witnessed the impact that Alzheimer's and dementia have on individuals and their families. In fact, approximately 18 percent of the clients Comfort Keepers serves have a primary diagnosis of dementia or Alzheimer's. Often called "the family disease," it is an especially nefarious affliction because its progressive nature forces family members to witness an inevitable and slow decline. At the same time, the stress placed on family resources - financial, emotional and otherwise - builds as their loved one's mental and physical degeneration demands increasing assistance.

### **Finding Resources for the Right Level of Personal Care**

When a family is faced with an Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis, they often make a commitment to keep their loved one in the comfort and familiarity of home for as long as possible. And indeed, [studies](#) have found that when families delay institutional care for dementia patients by keeping them in their homes or with family, patients live longer. Yet meeting the daily needs of their loved one can be both physically and emotionally draining. Last year, friends and family provided approximately [18.4 billion hours of unpaid care](#) to loved ones diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

To achieve the best outcomes, families need help to make it all work, and will often turn to their loved one's physician and healthcare providers for additional resources. It is important to for families to keep in mind that because of the disease's progressive nature, the assistance they require today may be much different than what they will need in the future. Starting off, the family will likely be able to handle most of the care duties for their loved one among themselves. But as the disease progresses, additional help will likely be necessary.

Indeed, research suggests that patients with Alzheimer's or dementia experience mental and physical health benefits from participating in activities where they have opportunities to move around and socialize. The advantages include improved cognitive function, enhanced mobility, and a better quality of life.



In-home care services can be an ideal choice, as they combine the benefits of staying at home and the mental stimulation of meeting a new acquaintance. When an in-home caregiver regularly visits an Alzheimer's or dementia patient, a true relationship is formed. This relationship exists outside the senior's normal sphere of influence, so communicating with a caregiver offers a chance to learn new things and have a unique form of socialization. In-home caregivers don't just help around the house; they also provide companionship.

Additional benefits that can be offered by in-home care providers include:

- creation and maintenance of a safe living environment
- preparation of well-balanced meals
- assistance with morning routines like getting up, bathing, toileting and dressing for the day
- light housekeeping and laundry support
- accompaniment to appointments, grocery shopping or prescription pickup
- mental stimulation and memory activities that can help to slow the progression of Alzheimer's and dementia
- [respite care](#) that enables the family to take time to handle their own needs or spend an entire weekend away to recuperate - all while knowing their loved one is in good hands.

The impact of Alzheimer's and dementia on families will always be significant, but with the help of an [in-home care resource](#) it can be lessened.

## Chapter Four

# Care Options

There are many options available as you look for care for a loved one faced with Alzheimer's and dementia.

## Care Options for Alzheimer's Patients

There are many components when looking at care options for Alzheimer's patients. Here are some options that may help. Some to reduce the burden, or others that you may not have thought of.



### **Proper Medical Care: Geriatric Medical Professionals**

Dementia is the medical category that Alzheimer's falls under. People will use the two terms interchangeably but in the medical setting, a neurologist or geriatrician will use them more specifically. They do this because some forms of dementia are treatable. For instance, vascular dementia is a form that can be treated depending on severity. That's why it is important to get a good diagnosis as this sets the foundation for the patient's care. Seeing a doctor that has experience in Alzheimer's or dementia should be a top priority. Doctors that specialize in geriatric patients, called Geriatricians, see many more patients with cognitive disorders than General Practitioners. The same is true for Neurologists that specialize in dementia. There are also Nurse Practitioners specializing in Gerontology.

Links to Geriatric medical professionals:

[Allina](#)

[Fairview](#)

[General](#)

## **Advanced Cases of Dementia**

For more advanced cases of dementia, there are specialized clinics that can help. The GRACE Unit provides inpatient services in a secure unit dedicated to treating older adults with acute psychiatric and behavioral health issues. This 14-bed unit is located within Regina Hospital and serves patients throughout Minnesota and Western Wisconsin. The GRACE staff at Allina recognizes the specialized needs of older adults whose mental health issues are often complicated by coexisting medical, social and economic factors. The first thing their team will do is a thorough evaluation to help determine what's causing behavioral and mental changes. Their highly skilled staff provides focused and compassionate care.

This interdisciplinary team includes:

- Geriatric Psychiatric Director
- Medical Director
- 24-hour Psychiatric Nursing Staff
- Social Services
- Activity Therapists

For entry into GRACE from home care, you would need a referral from your doctor. Facilities can refer directly to the clinic.

## **Technology**

The use of technology would not be an option to replace the human element in dementia care but it can be a key piece of making the care better--perhaps even more affordable. Alzheimer's tends to lend itself to more simple solutions, however, here are some thoughts about a few technology solutions that can help in the right circumstance.

- **Personal Emergency Response Systems** can be helpful for people with Alzheimer's if they have wandering issues. In most cases, there should be someone else in the home to make sure they are being used correctly. Experts can help you pick the best [product](#) to cover the needs of the patient and help reduce the potential for misunderstanding how it works and what oversight might be needed. Nothing is worse than having someone feel they are safe only to find out the device you're trusting isn't designed for a particular use or you didn't know about the proper way to utilize the product.
- **ID Bracelets** come in many varieties now utilizing technology that can be very helpful for seniors. The information on this [wristband](#) can be scanned by emergency personnel and they can get both a medical history and a home address. Medical history can be vitally important! There are other technical solutions that use memory sticks or other online solutions. Please do your homework if you decide to go this route. Currently, these devices cannot help find a loved one that may have wandered.
- **Animated Animals** can help soothe the mind of someone suffering from Alzheimer's. Ageless Innovation has come out with animated animals [like these](#) for just over \$100. They react to the person holding them, purr, bark, meow, wiggle, rollover, etc. These types of animations have been known to be quite comforting and worth a try now that they are less expensive. [Rocking](#) chairs have also been known to reduce stress and help with balance, another issue that may become worse when people have Alzheimer's.

## Adult Day Programs

Alzheimer's patients often do better at night if they go to a day program and get a lot of interaction during the day. Families report less sundowning, anxiety and other related behaviors when their family member attends a program. Many of the programs have buses to pick and drop them off and have lunch available for them. The facility may have it designed for them to interact as a group or for each one of their attendees to get a program that interests them individually. Some of the organizations are culturally inclusive to a particular ethnic or language background. Trying one of these programs can enrich the patient's life and help the family provide better care when they are not quite as stressed out themselves.

## Group Homes

Board and care homes, also called residential care facilities or group homes, are small private facilities, usually with 20 or fewer residents. Rooms may be private or shared. Residents receive personal care and meals and have staff available around the clock. Nursing and medical care usually are not provided on-site. Group homes come with a wide variety of capabilities and expertise. For instance, homes may have expertise in dementia, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injury or the elderly. They may provide personal care, or expect the resident to be able to do their own personal care. While this is a very viable option for people suffering from dementia, it is also an option that requires family members to do thorough research to make sure they have made a good long term selection. In some instances, the owners of the home also provide the care and live on site. When the owner is a part of the equation it can keep the cost down or improve the level of care provided--all something that should be thoroughly researched.

## VA Homes

The Veterans Administration has various levels of services available for US military veterans and their families. The best way to see if you qualify would be to meet with a County Veterans Service Officer in your area. They can discuss what the veteran's needs are and the process of eligibility for those needs. The VA has nursing homes, clinics and programs like aid and attendance that can assist families with the cost and medical issues related to Alzheimer's.

Veterans homes exist around the state, Minneapolis, Hastings, Fergus Falls, Silver Bay and in the future Bemidji. Established in 1978, the Home in Hastings provides a wide variety of services for Veterans suffering from chemical dependency, mental health illnesses, dual disorders, and/or the debilitating effects of aging. Like all VA services, you need to meet the acceptance criteria to utilize the benefits. [Click here](#) for information.

## Other Options

There are a plethora of options available for care in the home or facilities such as assisted living or nursing homes. Check out [this blog](#) for more information.

## **Additional Thoughts**

There are so many facets to Alzheimer's and aging in general. It's always a good idea to know what the legal issues might be through this journey and to be prepared. Here is a one-page document that's easy to understand related to what you need to know to care for an aging loved one. The advice in [this article](#) in itself can provide cost-savings and reduce potential future headaches. It can make a huge difference to get Power of Attorney work and other legal documents signed while the Alzheimer's sufferer is still legally competent to do so! If you have not--do it now!!

Check out [our website](#) for additional information on Alzheimer's and dementia resources!

## Chapter Five

# What is Memory Care?

Memory care can be multi-faceted and individualized to meet the needs of seniors and their families.



## What is Memory Care?



Memory care addresses the needs of a person with dementia and is generally something we are considering for a loved one that is having memory issues or has been diagnosed with a form of dementia, like Alzheimer's. Since the symptoms of dementia can change and progress, care could be something as simple as reminding someone to take medications or more comprehensive like bathing that person. Unfortunately, there is no cure for Alzheimer's or dementia nor is there any direct test to show someone has the disease. Because of this, there are a number of tests medical professionals can use to help them determine if someone suffers from Alzheimer's such as the [SAGE test](#) (Self Administered Geocognitive Evaluation). This helps determine if dementia is present and what the severity level may be.

## Overview of Memory Loss

Typically when people start looking at memory care they are concerned about either their own memory or that of a loved one. It's completely normal as we age for our memory to seem like it's not as sharp as it once was. In fact, when we age we do lose some ability to recall things.

According to the National Institute on Aging, forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging. As people get older, changes occur in all parts of the body, including the brain. As a result, some people may notice that it takes longer to learn new things, they don't remember information as well as they did, or they lose things like their glasses. These usually are signs of mild forgetfulness, not serious memory problems, like Alzheimer's disease.

Take a look at the table below or check out [our blog on forgetfulness](#) as a guide to see if you or your loved one could be experiencing more than normal memory issues.

Normal Aging	Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias
Making a bad decision once in a while	Making poor judgments and decisions a lot of the time
Missing a monthly payment	Problems taking care of monthly bills
Forgetting which day it is and remembering it later	Losing track of the date or time of year
Sometimes forgetting which word to use	Trouble having a conversation
Losing things from time to time	Misplacing things often and being unable to find them

## Memory Care Options

There are a number of options at home and in other settings that are available to those needing assistance with memory care. Here are a few options to consider for memory care services:

**In-home dementia care** is specifically focused on those with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. While caregivers offer the same assistance in regular home care, dementia caregivers are trained on the types of dementia, how it manifests, behavioral issues, strategies to adequately deal with them, and safety issues related to dementia.

**Retirement housing** may be appropriate for individuals with early-stage Alzheimer's who are still able to care for themselves independently. A person may be able to live alone safely but has difficulty managing an entire house. Generally, this type of senior housing provides limited supervision and may offer opportunities for social activities, transportation, and other amenities.

**Assisted living** bridges the gap between living independently and living in a nursing home. It typically offers a combination of housing, meals, supportive services, and health care. Assisted living is not regulated by the federal government and its definitions vary from state to state. Not all assisted living facilities offer services specifically designed for people with dementia, so it is important to ask.

**Nursing homes** (also called skilled nursing facility, long-term care facility, custodial care) provide round-the-clock care and long-term medical treatment. Most nursing homes have services and staff to address issues such as nutrition, care planning, recreation, spirituality, and medical care. Different nursing homes have different staff-to-resident ratios. Also, the staff at one nursing home may have more experience or training with dementia than the staff at another. Nursing homes are usually licensed by the state and regulated by the federal government.

**Alzheimer's special care units (SCUs)**, also called memory care units, are designed to meet the specific needs of individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementias. SCUs can take many forms and exist within various types of residential care, including assisted living facilities, and they may or may not be locked or secure units. Such units most often cluster settings in which persons with dementia are grouped on a floor or a unit within a larger residential care facility. Some states have legislation requiring nursing homes and assisted living residences to disclose their fees and list the specialized services their SCU provides, including trained staff, specialized activities and the ability of staff to care for residents with behavioral needs. Because laws vary, it is important to ask specific questions about what type of care is provided in an SCU to ensure that the level of care is appropriate for the person.

**Continuing care retirement communities (CCRC)** provide different levels of care (independent, assisted living and nursing home) based on individual needs. A resident is able to move throughout the different levels of care within the community if his or her needs change. Payment for these types of facilities can include an initial entry fee with subsequent monthly fees or payment may be based solely on monthly fees.

**Group Homes** for people with **dementia** provide good quality care and a domestic environment where people can live as individuals and families can get involved. However, tension can arise when it comes to deciding who takes responsibilities for certain practical and caring tasks.

## **Care Throughout the Stages of Dementia**

Just like everything in life, there is not a one size fits all solution for those in need of memory care. Here are some things to think about as you explore your options:

**Early Stage**--According to the Alzheimer's Association 50% or more of the people at Assisted Living facilities or retirement communities suffer to some degree of dementia. Generally, these facilities are prepared to handle early-stage dementia and have resources to help them accommodate some of the less difficult behaviors. At some point, it will likely be necessary to find a facility that can handle the more severe nature of the disease as it progresses.

**Early to Mid Stage**--Home Care and Group Homes can both be a good place for early to mid-stage dementia. Provided the patient has the financial resources necessary, they may be able to stay at home throughout the progression of the disease. Late stages may require round the clock care at some point. Group Home capabilities will vary by provider and a thorough knowledge of their competency in regard to staffing and experience needs to be addressed upfront.

**Mid to Late Stage**--Around the clock care is available at many Nursing Homes for late-stage dementia. Memory Care (Special Care Units) facilities will also have around the clock staff and could be a good solution for moderate to late-stage dementia. It's important to determine how the provider's capabilities meet the needs of your loved one.

Be sure you completely understand the financial aspect of how each provider works, what kind of payment they take and how they handle periods where the resident may be gone, like hospitalization or travel.

Check out [our website](#) for more information and resources on Alzheimer's and dementia.

### **Acknowledgments:**

Alzheimer's Association of Minnesota and North Dakota

National Institute on Aging

Dementia Care Central

## Chapter Six

# Dementia Care Costs

Cost of care can vary based on a number of factors including setting, stage of dementia, and individual needs.

## Dementia Care Costs

Many factors can impact in home dementia care costs. This may include the structure and layout of the home itself that may need modification, safety equipment, technology solutions, help that family and friends can provide, and how much professional help needs to be brought in to the home. Home care for



seniors with dementia is relatively the same as for people with regular cognitive abilities when it comes to most home modifications. This is especially true in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. As the disease progresses, safety concerns need to be considered and how the care providers need to modify their approach to assisting the person with the disease.

### Home Modifications

Depending upon the physical health of your loved one with dementia, you may need to make or plan for some home modifications to support their care at home, especially as their condition progresses or if they begin to have additional mobility issues as they age. Things to consider at this stage include mobility, eye sight, arthritis, dexterity, strength and safety. A reasonable list of things you can modify in most homes would include.

1. Grab bars are essential for areas in the bathroom like the shower and bathtub. They can also be of great assistance near the toilet. It's something the home handyman can do themselves, but be sure to read the directions and put yourself in the environment to determine the best placement of the grab bars.
2. Ramps, even if your parents don't use a wheelchair, a ramp eliminates the need to navigate steps, which can make maintaining balance difficult, even with a banister. A 16-foot long ramp costs around \$1,600. You can also get indoor threshold ramps that you put in doorways to form a seamless surface to transition from one room to another.
3. Bathroom heat lamps can make the transition from shower to getting dressed much more comfortable. People with Alzheimer's often dislike bathing and anything that can be done to make this a more pleasurable experience can make things better for the caregiver and affected person.
4. According to AARP, technology has become one of the most important developments in helping people stay in their own home as they age. Home technology like medical alert buttons, home security and remote monitoring or communication systems are particularly beneficial.
5. Faucets can be updated to allow for touch free operation. This can be both for safety and ease of use. Some faucets come with the ability to set the temperature so the senior can't be scalded.
6. Improve your lighting to maintain sufficient brightness throughout the home. This should include hallways and around doors to make these areas of the home brighter. Alzheimer's sufferers often avoid dark areas and will avoid them.

## Home Monitoring

If you're looking for a home monitoring system specific to aging in place, a certified aging in place specialist can outfit your loved one's home with different sensors that you can monitor from your smartphone. You can know when your dad gets out of bed thanks to a pressure-sensitive mat placed next to his side of the bed. You can have a sensor put on the medicine cabinet door so you'll know if your mom takes her medicine. Likewise, you can have heat sensors installed on the stove and front and rear door sensors put in. Lighting can be controlled to maintain safety. Aging in place home monitoring systems like HomeExcept cost around \$230 for the system and have a monthly monitoring fee around \$20-\$30.

Major modifications to homes can also be done. For instance, if there are a lot of steps you can put in stair lift systems.



## Help from Others

Family and Friends can have a beneficial impact on the cost of caring for someone with dementia. Because Alzheimer's is a progressive disease, people in the early stages can still work with task lists, regular communications, and making sure medications are being taken and they are eating properly. Alzheimer's patients need a lot of support during this stage so they know they are not in this alone. Every journey with Alzheimer's is slightly different but if you can help them stay at home longer, it will help overall costs of the disease be more manageable in the later stages. [Here](#) is a more complete discussion of caring for an Alzheimer's patient at home.

If you have a good support network within your family (ultimately saving money) but still need professional help, ask how the company deals with caregivers outside of their organization. Some companies have shared calendars and family room style communications so they can more easily fit into the overall care plan. It's also very important to establish who will be the primary contact for the company to work with, this avoids issues that can lead to increased costs for added shifts due to confusion.

*When it comes to dementia care, a wide variety of options will exist from company to company*

Often, you will be looking at an hourly charge for in-home care services. In Minnesota, this can typically range anywhere from \$30-\$40 per hour depending on services, area, and the company you are working with. There may also be hourly minimums and weekly or monthly minimums required for service. According to the [MN Department of Human Services](#), the average cost for 44 weekly hours of home care totals \$60,000 per year compared to over \$90,000 a year for nursing home care and \$48,000 per year for an assisted living with no services and not including additional fees.

As hourly rates can be very competitive, it's very important to look beyond what the standard charges are covering and more at the experience a company and their staff has and how they plan on caring for your loved one.

## **What Influences Cost of Professional Care?**

Many things can impact the cost of professional home care services. Home care in Minnesota normally breaks down into two different components. Basic services that could include companionship, errands, light housekeeping, transportation, meal preparation and other services that don't require the services of a nurse.

Comprehensive services are tasks that the Department of Human Services has determined to require the supervision of a nurse. They would include medication management, safe transfers, catheter care, and others that are delegated and monitored by an RN. In some situations, companies may charge more for comprehensive care which often is not needed at the early stages of dementia. Here are some things to consider:

- Basic versus comprehensive services based off of the care needs of the individual
- Nurse services
- Hourly and/or weekly minimums of scheduled care
- Overnight Services asleep vs awake
- Complex services provided by a nurse or delegated service from a nurse to an aide
- Caring for multiple people in the home

## **Weighing the Costs of Home Care vs a Facility**

Typically an Assisted Living is going to be the setting most people with Alzheimer's start with if they choose to leave home. Assisted Living can provide a safety net that reduces the opportunity for their resident to wander into the community. There will likely be other services available for nursing, entertainment and dining options. If the Alzheimer's sufferer does not have heightened safety issues, this may be a good environment. Costs often are ale-carte so as the the resident has increased needs, the costs go up in proportion. At an Assisted Living, there is no one supervising the person directly so there is an opportunity for injury from a fall or other-self related safety issues.

As stated above, the cost of Assisted Living in Minnesota, with no services or additional fees, averages \$48,000 per year. Depending on the needs of the resident, the cost can reach upwards of \$10,000 per month when additional services and fees are added. While home care can be more expensive if the patient needs extensive one-on-one care, home care companies and families have a lot of options they can employ to keep the patient safe and at a lower cost. This can be very helpful in the long run to keep overall long term costs more manageable.

Generally, if someone is safe living at an Assisted Living they would also be safe living at home. These individuals generally need limited supervision and are not a risk to themselves. Having a family or home care agency come in from one day per week to every day for a few hours is going to be much less expensive than living in an Assisted Living if there is no home mortgage. The caregiver can make sure the essentials are being met such as proper hygiene, nutrition, and cleanliness. This is a condition that is likely to change over time but can save money in the early stages that may be needed later as the disease progresses. Here is a list of [things to consider](#) for an Alzheimer's sufferer to live alone.

Check out [our website](#) for additional resources and information on in home dementia care costs!

Acknowledgments:

Mayo Clinic

Alzheimer's Association of Minnesota and North Dakota

## Chapter Seven

# Alternatives to Care Facilities

While a care facility may be appropriate for some, there are other options to consider.

## Alternatives to Care Facilities

### Consider Care at Home

When we start the process of looking for care options for Alzheimers patients, we are faced with difficult choices. Sometimes the easy choice would seem to be assisted living facilities or memory care facilities. These can be great choices depending on the stage and type of dementia you are faced with finding care for. One of the first things that may come to mind during this decision is **cost**. If they are in the early stages of the disease, cost can be a major consideration as Alzheimer's is a progressive disease and you could be faced with a long journey if the person is otherwise healthy. Over time, this can stretch financial resources to the breaking point. For that reason, home care can be a very viable option as a starting point in many situations.

One of the key things to consider when looking at home care or an assisted living facility is **safety**. It may seem odd to mention assisted living along with safety concerns but some facilities that will take someone with Alzheimer's into their building may not have the staffing or capability to handle more advanced stages of the disease. Many of the same issues, like stoves or open doors that allow wandering, can be just as dangerous at an assisted living facility as it can be living at home by themselves. Facilities themselves may not suit the patient from an emotional standpoint. Memory care facilities are normally able to handle a variety of issues related to Alzheimer's, and therefore generally are a better choice, if they are affordable.



There are a number of benefits to providing care at home that could enlist the services of a home care provider when the family can't provide support or when they need supplemental care.

Such possible benefits include:

- Allowing the senior to remain in a familiar setting
- Ensuring that the senior is safe at home or when involved with outside activities
- Having a home care aide assist the senior with prompting to reinforce key messages and help them with tasks. For example, a home care aide may remind the senior how to dress, help avoid dangerous areas in the home and reduce their stress by reviewing family pictures and names.
- Helping the family caregiver provide bathing, toileting, and hygiene for the senior
- Providing respite care or free time for family members
- Be available to help with additional support for the family caregiver when the senior attends functions such as family events
- Assist with recreation and appropriate distraction for the individual, including keeping them involved in favorite hobbies
- Having a nurse to help the family or caregiver administer medications
- Teaching family members and friends how to best communicate with the Alzheimer's sufferer

One thing about Alzheimer's is that it is an ever-changing and progressing disease. That's why so many families find it beneficial to provide care in a home-based setting so they can understand the needs prior to making the decision to move their loved one to a facility.

## **Preparing for Care at Home**

There are many things to consider prior to taking on care at home. The first thing to do is work with a doctor or medical professional that understands Alzheimer's. Often, a general practitioner does not have the experience necessary to provide the support you need to make good decisions and offer the medical care necessary. Medical systems generally will have practitioners that specialize in Alzheimer's. These people could be Geriatric Nurse Practitioners; Geriatric Medical Doctors; Neurologists or even MD's that specialize in seniors. These medical professionals may be able to prescribe medications that reduce the symptoms of the disease after they determine it is Alzheimer's.

The next thing to consider is the safety aspect of caring for Alzheimer's victims at home. The [stage](#) of the disease will often determine the viability of home care. It's always a great question to ask the doctor to see if they feel things are still manageable at home. Many home care companies can also send out their RN or Care Coordination Specialist to help decide if they are good candidates for home care.

Considerations for safely caring for someone with Alzheimer's is not an insurmountable task provided they are good candidates. Here is a [list](#) from the National Institute on Aging of things to consider. The institute points out these as primary factors to consider for staying home alone:

Does the person with Alzheimer's:

- Become confused or unpredictable under stress?
- Recognize a dangerous situation, for example, fire?
- Know how to use the telephone in an emergency?
- Know how to get help?
- Stay content within the home?
- [Wander](#) and become disoriented?
- Show signs of [agitation](#), [depression](#), or withdrawal when left alone for any period of time?
- Attempt to pursue former [interests or hobbies](#) that might now warrant supervision, such as cooking, appliance repair, or woodworking?

You may want to [seek input and advice from a healthcare professional](#) to assist you in these considerations. As [Alzheimer's disease progresses](#), these questions will need ongoing evaluation.

## **Caring for Your Loved One at Their Home, or Yours**

Not all of us have the option to take care of a loved one with Alzheimer's in our own homes. If it's possible, it can be a rewarding experience to make a tremendous difference in the life of another. It may also present many challenges to those that attempt it. As a family caregiver, it's always wise to look out for your own well being. Here's a [guide](#) to help you stay at the top of your game and work with other people involved.

Once you have taken on the task of family caregiving it is a great idea to make sure your skills are honed and appropriate for the level of care needed. Fortunately, the Alzheimer's Association provides free [online training](#) to help you and other family members. If you hire an outside agency you should question them on the type of training and level of experience caregivers will have that will be working with your loved one. There are a number of other standard things to consider when you select a home care company--[here's a list](#) of important questions to ask.

## **Facilities Near Me**

If you choose to use a facility now or at some point in the future, a quick visit to your google browser will give you a number of choices when it comes to memory care facilities. Each one of these facilities may have their own specific niche, for instance some may be better set up to handle wandering, while others can handle highly combative patients. Just like doing this at home, the faces of Alzheimer's will change during their stay at a facility. You need to be vigilant in making sure the facility you choose can continue to provide adequate services for your loved one as the disease progresses. A good facility will want to evaluate the patient for appropriateness and will do ongoing evaluations to make sure they are able to meet their changing care needs.

Check out [our website](#) for more information and resources on caring for someone with Alzheimer's or dementia.

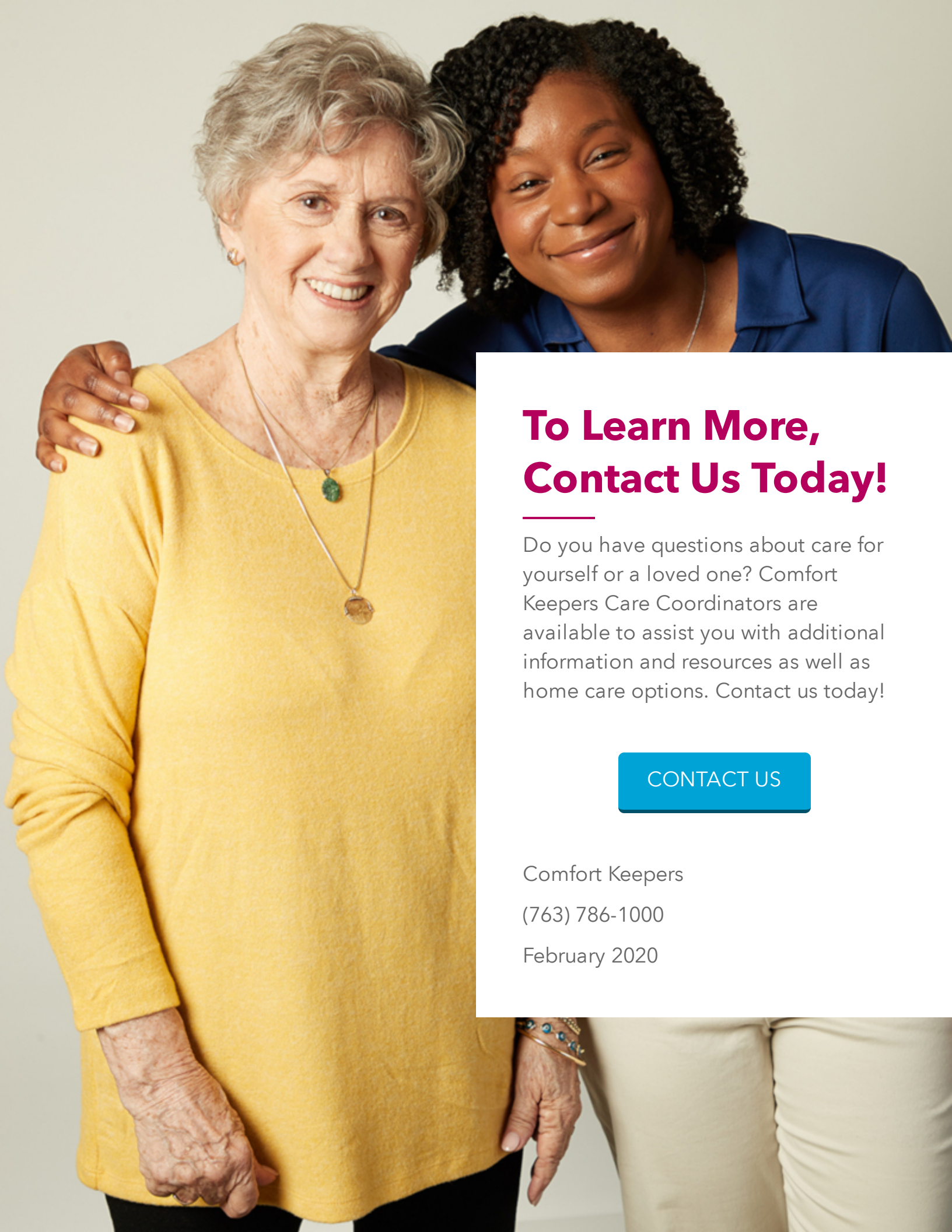
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Madalyn and Leonard Abramson Center for Jewish Life

Minnesota North Dakota Alzheimer's Association

Comfort Keepers





## To Learn More, Contact Us Today!

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Do you have questions about care for yourself or a loved one? Comfort Keepers Care Coordinators are available to assist you with additional information and resources as well as home care options. Contact us today!

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