



# Selecting an Assisted Living Community:

## 10 Questions to Ask (AND WHAT THE ANSWERS REVEAL)

Choosing the right assisted living facility—for yourself or a loved one—can be a painstaking process.

With so many factors to consider, asking relevant questions is critical to determining the best choice. To help making an informed decision easier, here are ten questions designed to yield valuable insight about an assisted living community.



# Introduction

In the early 1980s, American rock band Van Halen became famous for its electrifying stage performances—while gaining notoriety for putting unusual demands on concert promoters. The band's most talked-about contract stipulation was for a backstage bowl of M&M's candy with all the brown M&M's removed. Most promoters attributed the eccentric request to stereotypical rockstar self-indulgence. But the band actually had a practical reason for including the M&M's clause in their contracts.

Producing Van Halen's flashy shows required significant amounts of staging platforms, lighting, and sound equipment, and back then many concert venues were unaccustomed to handling such sophisticated setups. For that reason, Van Halen's contracts contained pages of specific guidelines for preparing the band's stage. Failure to follow those instructions posed potential safety issues for the band and their audiences.

As the band would explain years later, the no-brown-M&M's clause was intended to serve as an indicator of how attentively a concert promoter had read the contract. Brown M&M's in the candy bowl suggested a promoter had not read the entire contract and, in all likelihood, had also failed to follow the stage setup guidelines. A presence of brown candies warned the band to closely inspect the stage for possible risks. <sup>1</sup>

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Of course, choosing an assisted living community for yourself or a loved one is a far cry from staging a rock concert. But asking questions up front can provide you with critical information about how a residential community operates. And, as the Van Halen story illustrates, a little ingenuity will help you find answers that might not be otherwise divulged.

With that lesson in mind, we've compiled a list of ten simple questions—the answers to which will yield valuable insight into residential life at the assisted living communities you're evaluating. Asking these questions will help you distinguish client-centered communities that always have their residents' best interests in mind from cost-oriented facilities that are more inclined to cut corners.

When it comes to selecting an assisted living provider, it's important to be demanding. So, make like a rockstar and probe for hidden warnings.





# 1 What time is breakfast?

Ask many assisted living facilities what time they serve breakfast and you're likely to get a firm answer, such as 8:00 a.m. Other communities might offer a somewhat more flexible timeframe—a range from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m., for example.

But grownups prefer to eat breakfast—and all other meals, for that matter—whenever they choose. Which raises the question, why should it be different for individuals who require assistance with activities of daily living? <sup>2</sup>

Asking “What time is breakfast?” is a good way to ascertain a facility’s approach to individual choice. A fixed meal schedule is often an indication that residents will be required to relinquish other personal choices as well.

Consider a case in which a facility serves everyone breakfast at 8:00 a.m. Staff members must make certain all residents are awake and out of bed, bathed and groomed, and dressed in time to eat. Allowing time for staff to assist everyone requires individuals to follow a predetermined daily schedule and—depending on their place in the schedule—can mean awaking hours ahead of breakfast. By the time they’ve had their first meal of the day, residents in this scenario have had the

choices of what time they wake up, when they shower, and what foods they eat already made for them.

In general, assisted living policies are either professional-directed or client-centered. Professional-directed facilities tend to follow strict itineraries, with daily regimens for everything from bedtime to mealtimes. Client centered communities, on the other hand, allow residents to choose what time they rise, and when they eat their meals. In fact, client-centered communities actually encourage residents to make their own choices about their daily activities. Research shows that clientcentered practices have higher positive outcomes for both residents and staff. <sup>3</sup>

If you’re looking for a client-centered assisted living community, the ideal answer to the question, “What time is breakfast?” would be “Whatever time you want.”

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