



The ***By Families,
For Families
Guide to
Assisted
Living***

**A Step-by-Step Guide
to Evaluating and
Transitioning to
an Assisted Living
Community**

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BONUS BOOKS:

**COMPANION WORKBOOK
& NEW RESIDENT GUIDE**

I assume you're reading this book because you or a loved is considering assisted living. Since you likely haven't gone through it before, the decisions can be overwhelming. I've written this book to help you make more informed decisions, and to be calm in what is likely to be an emotional storm. I sincerely hope I can help you avoid some of the pitfalls of learning the assisted living ropes.

While a move to assisted living may initially be seen as negative, I know first-hand that with some careful and thoughtful planning, you can make it a huge positive for all concerned.

Over the last several years, my relationship with my mother has strengthened. She has become one of my best friends and an integral part of my life.

I hope you enjoy reading this book, and that I'm able to somehow make your journey a bit easier.

Ryan Malone

How to Use This Book

This guide consists of four components. They are:

- This book, *The By Families, For Families Guide to Assisted Living*
- A companion workbook, *The By Families, For Families Workbook*
- *Your First Month in Assisted Living*, a book dedicated to making your loved one's first month a happy time.
- My personal recommendation of books you'll find useful – the *Assisted Living Book Club*.

After completing critical topical areas within the main book, you'll be asked to refer to the workbook. I recommend you print the workbook and put it in a 3-ring binder, as you'll need it during your journey.

The transition to assisted living is a very personal one, and you'll likely encounter different situations and opportunities than I. I'd love to hear about your successes, failures and concerns. Please don't hesitate to write me at book@insideassistedliving.com. I'll do the best I can to answer you.

Finally, when you are finished reading this book, I encourage you to visit [Inside Assisted Living](#), my blog dedicated to our goal in this book. Inside Assisted Living offers a continuous source of new information, research, public policy discussions and practical tips for families considering or already in an assisted living community.

Let's get started.

Armchair Exercise is Not an Activity



C H A P T E R T E N

Planned correctly, activities will become the cherished part of your loved one's day. To set our frame of reference, let's look at a typical assisted living day from the perspective of the resident:

6:45 – 7:30am

Have breakfast and receive assistance for a shower from the aide that I'm already comfortable with

7:30 – 9:00am

Make my way down to breakfast. An aide will assisted me to the dining room if necessary, and the medication technician will provide my medications for the day.

9:30 – 10:30am

Morning exercises in the activity room include some stretches, leg lifts and rubber band exercises.

10:30 – 11:30am

Choice of a scenic drive or reading a book by the fireplace. If I take the scenic drive, the van will be wheelchair-accessible.

11:30 – 1:00pm

Lunch and return to my apartment to rest for a while.

2:30 – 4:30pm

Different things happen on different days. During a week, I'll usually see education presentation, musical performances or craft demonstrations. Nothing is required if I am tired.

4:30 – 6:00pm

Dinner.

6:00 – Bedtime

Evenings can bring visits from family and friends, outings in the community van, or quiet time at home.

Before Mom got sick, she was an active lady. By active, I don't mean she walked every morning. Rather, she was involved in almost every woman's club in town, dedicated time to fundraising and countless local charities and took a deep level of interest in her family's lives.

I vividly recall the first community I visited. As the admissions director walked me through the amenities during the tour, I drifted thinking about whether my mom would be bored there. I asked the admissions director what their most unique activity was. She responds: "armchair exercises."

She proudly told me about the activity and suggested that I stay 30 minutes for the start of the next session. I was intrigued, so I stayed.

Slowly a few residents arrived, most of them with the help of a community caregiver and a wheelchair. Once seated in a semi-circle, the activities coordinator began walking the residents through a number of arm and leg motions.

The concept was solid. The problem: the activities director either didn't notice or didn't care that the residents weren't participating. Many residents had a scowl on the face, evidence of the fact that they did not want to be there. Others went through the motions as best they could.

I remember thinking to myself when I left the community: armchair exercise is not an activity!

The point of my story is not to be sarcastic, but rather to illustrate something important. Activities represent an important part of your loved one's day. They should be engaging both physically and mentally.

Being physically active can prevent and help treat many of the most common chronic medical conditions associated with old age. Physical activity is one of the most important steps older adults can take to maintain physical and mental health and quality of life. Yet today, more than 60% of older adults are inactive – and this number is probably much higher for residents of assisted living communities. Many are sedentary, physically unfit, and experience disability from chronic medical conditions as they age.

Community administration and staff members hear many reasons from residents as to why they are not active:

- It doesn't feel good.
- It makes my arthritic joints hurt.
- It takes too much time.
- It's boring.

However, they need physical activity more today than they care to admit. In fact, without physical exercise they will continue to suffer the loss of strength and stamina.

Walking groups and physical activity programs can help residents become and remain active.

Strength training is recommended for all adults, but it is a vital link to health for older adults. The reason is that strength training prevents *sarcopenia*, the muscle deterioration that comes with aging, and also helps maintain bone mass. "Stronger people have better health outcomes," noted Dr. David Buchner, Chief of CDC's Physical Activity and Health Branch and renowned Gerontologist. However, some elderly people avoid physical activity and become sedentary out of fear of falling and fracturing a bone. Dr. Buchner added that emerging data indicate that physical activity can prevent falls by improving strength, balance, and endurance.

*Keeping Young at Heart*⁹ aerobic activity, which is cardiorespiratory or cardiovascular endurance activity, is also important. It keeps the heart strong, lowers blood pressure, and relieves anxiety and depression. Even when the activities in a program such as this one are too strenuous, older adults can obtain significant health benefits with moderate physical activity, such as walking or gardening.

“We need to make physical activity part of the daily routine for older adults,” said Dr. Buchner.¹⁰ To that end, you should search for a community that has an active, diverse fitness program. Or, should the community you select have less-than-desirable physical activity programs, become instrumental in developing them.

WHAT ABOUT MENTAL FITNESS?

A large-scale study of women aged 65 and older found that cognitive decline was least common in those who were most physically active, while a large-scale study of men aged 71 and older found that those who walked less than a quarter of a mile a day were nearly twice as likely to develop dementia as those who walked more than two miles a day.

Basically then, aerobic exercise appears to improve higher cognitive functions (planning, organization and working memory) in the elderly. Another way physical training may help cognitive function in the elderly is by increasing their confidence in their abilities.

A small 14-day study found that those following a memory improvement plan that included memory training, a healthy diet, physical exercise, and stress reduction, showed a better performance on a cognitive measure controlled by this brain region, and participants reported that they felt their memory had improved.

⁹ This is the American Physical Therapy Association’s program for cardiac fitness in seniors. You can download the related tips booklet at: http://www.apta.org/AM/Images/APTA_IMAGES/ContentImages/ptandbody/youngatheart/YoungAtHeart.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.medicinenet.com/exercise_and_activity/page4.htm

The memory training involved doing brainteasers, crossword puzzles and memory exercises. Diet involved eating 5 small meals daily (to prevent fluctuations in blood glucose levels) that were rich in omega-3 fats, low-glycemic index carbohydrates (e.g., whole grains) and anti-oxidants. Physical exercise involved brisk walking and stretching, and stress reduction involved stretching and relaxation exercises.¹²

ACTIVITIES DONE RIGHT

During the writing of this book, I met a woman whom I consider to be the model activities director. Her name is Terri Glimcher and she is the Life Enrichment Coordinator for Emeritus Senior Living. In addition to her duties at Oak Park Assisted Living in Clermont, Florida, she also serves as a trainer for many other local communities. If her techniques were universally adopted, this chapter would be completely unnecessary.

I've spoken to Terri several times during the course of the book, as she is a true expert in her field. She gets it!

To reword our discussion would not serve her great work justice, so I've included the entire transcript of our discussion.

RYAN: Thanks for spending the time with me, Terri. The work you've done at Emeritus has been amazing.

TERRI: Thanks for the kind words.

RYAN: Let's go ahead and get started. What is your role at the company?

TERRI: I am the Life Enrichment Coordinator for Summerville at Oak Park Assisted Living, an Emeritus Senior Living property in Clermont Florida. I am also on the marketing team here at Oak Park.

RYAN: Sounds like a lot of hats! Being a marketing guy from a previous life I know what

¹¹ http://www.memory-key.com/Seniors/senior_research_exercise.htm

¹² http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2005-12/g-nsf121205.htm

you're going through. I'd like to focus on the *activities* portion of your responsibilities. Would that be okay?

TERRI: Sure.

RYAN: What is the role of “activities” in an assisted living environment?

TERRI: Great question! Activities play a very important role in assisted living. It is very important to keep the mind and body challenged and stimulated throughout the day. More importantly, however, is the socialization that comes with activities. It is very important for your loved one to feel *connected* in their new residence. Activities will help to do this. Activities also help the resident continue to enjoy many things they used to do. This consistency helps with the overall transition to assisted living.

RYAN: That makes a lot of sense. I know it was tough for my mom to transition to assisted living, because she was so active before.

TERRI: What did she do?

RYAN: She was involved in women's club, some charities and card parties with her lady friends. She missed all that when she got into assisted living, as she remembered what it was like before her stroke.

TERRI: That sounds tough.

RYAN: It was. Anyway, let me ask you another question. What do most assisted living communities do wrong with regard to activities?

TERRI: I only know from many that I have observed that they do not meet the needs of ALL residents. They focus on the mainstream population and often have activities that people with special needs such as physical, visual or hearing cannot participate in. In my community, we make sure that adaptive equipment is in place so that all residents can participate in any activity.

RYAN: That's great to hear...

TERRI: I also firmly believe that the residents should have choices in their schedule, which is why a resident council should be in place. This is their home and activities

should be available at all times for residents to participate in as a group or individually. That piece lacks in many communities. Another important factor is that the assisted living community should be connected to the local community. Many times residents feel isolated because their whole world revolves around the community. The community is very open to seniors and it is a great way to keep them connected.

RYAN: Your approach sounds really unique. What have you planned that is unique?

TERRI: I really believe that most of my activities are unique in that age never plays a role in what I plan. We are always involved in a community service project of some kind. My knitting class made baby hats for the neonatal unit at our local hospital. We donated 150 hats. They were also involved in the *Give a Kid a Backpack Program* here. The residents hand-craft a beautiful teddy bear to go in each backpack received by the children. We have made soldier caps that were sent to Iraq, we raised money for breast cancer awareness and many more. Seniors enjoy giving back. They feel a part of a bigger picture.

RYAN: That's really amazing. This is the kind of thing that probably makes a big difference to the residents. It seems like having a purpose is often missing for many of the assisted living residents I've met.

TERRI: Absolutely. In talking with the residents, I learned that not working and not having responsibilities was the hardest part for them. In hearing that, I came up with a list of jobs within our building and held a huge job fair for the residents. Each resident who wanted a job came down dressed up, filled out an application for the position, and was interviewed by me. This gave them a chance to tell me about their former careers and what it was like to work when they were growing up. It was wonderful. They all got the jobs they applied for -- floral committee, taking statistics, welcome committee, sending get well cards, watering plants etc. I can tell you that for three years, every one of them has taken their job very seriously. We are a family here, and it takes a family to make it work. They receive \$100.00 a week funny money and shop at our General Store. I also started the *Bridging the Generations* program with all the local high schools. This is ongoing for three years now. The high school kids come to Oak Park and are paired up with the residents. They do projects together, cook together, etc. We celebrate holidays with the students. I bring the residents into the high school so that students learn about

the aging process. The students play their instruments for the residents and work on their science fair projects with them. The residents are truly mentors for these students. We have been recognized by the Orlando Sentinel many times for outstanding programs here. One of our greatest activities was “Biker Day” at Oak Park. A local merchant brought their Harley’s to Oak Park. Each resident dressed up in leathers with headbands and posed for pictures on the bikes. We sent pictures to the families saying “And you thought your loved one was at home knitting!” We got a huge response of laughter from all involved. It was a blast!

RYAN: (Laughs) That sounds incredible. You really owe yourself a pat on the back for such great work! Can you please send me a picture of Biker Day? That sounds awesome!

TERRI: Sure, no problem.

RYAN: So, in your opinion, how have the residents benefited from those unique activities?

TERRI: The residents feel a part of the community. They truly see that they make a difference. They are loved and respected by so many people in this community. The merchants come here to do activities with them. The local florist does flower arranging, Home Depot does workshops with them, Ritters Frozen Custard makes sundaes here, and we have a merchant that sets up a fruit stand in our lobby with fresh fruits and veggies that the residents can choose at no charge. They feel very connected. It’s not just being part of their residence, but still maintaining a sense of community. That is important factor in maintaining good emotional health.

RYAN: Very cool. How do you mix physical and cognitive activities?

TERRI: I do a lot of physical and cognitive activities. I run a cooking class. We have measuring, kneading, peeling, cutting, those are all good ways to combined both physical and cognitive. We bowl and golf both in the community and out. The residents keep the score. We play twister with word games. Scavenger hunts, walking club, following a map to the destination. Most of the activities have both components as a part of it.

RYAN: I really appreciate your spending so much time with me. I am learning so much. I have a couple more questions if that is okay?

TERRI: Sure, happy to spend the time with someone who's so passionate about it.

RYAN: Thanks! Ok, so what would you recommend from an activities perspective to readers evaluating assisted living communities?

TERRI: I think it's very important to ask a lot of questions. You want to make sure that there are activities going on all day that include, physical activities, crafts that include a product that the residents can take to their rooms, outings, and cognitive activities. You want your loved one to be able to make choices in his or her schedule. A big component is to find out how they will help your family member connect when they first come in to the community. "What can you do to help my mom or dad connect if they do not want to come out of their room?" You should also make sure that there are outings outside of the community and that there is community involvement consistently. If people are sitting in the lobby with no activity, chances are that is the way it will be when your loved one lives there. Look for resident participation - talk to the residents. They are the best indicators of what truly goes on in the assisted living community. They will tell you if they are active or not. Stimulation is very important. If you don't use all your faculties, you begin to lose them. Make sure each and every part of your loved one is being challenged daily.

RYAN: Last question. Do you have any other advice for the readers?

TERRI: Take the time to look around at different communities. Talk to residents; request a report from the Department on Aging for the state survey of the community. You can request it from the community as well. They have to show it to you. That is the law. This will give you the information on any violations the community has had. It covers resident care as well as dietary issues. This is an important piece of information to have. There are agencies that are able to help with the cost of assisted living. If you are a spouse of a veteran or a veteran yourself, there are ways to receive help. Look in to all options before making your decision. Remember, this is your family member's home. It should not have a *community* feel but the feel of being home.

Terri's activities plan is not the norm, although I wish it were. However, it should serve as an example of the kinds of things available to your loved one.

Unfortunately, many assisted living communities follow our typical day example rather than the fine example Terri has described. Do *not* be lazy about finding a community with good activities. It is a major social and emotional outlet for your loved one.