What to pack for a loved one moving into residential care

Starting a new chapter in a care home

Moving into a residential care home is a significant change, both for the person moving and for their family. The focus is often on the practicalities of the move itself, but what you pack can make a real difference to how quickly a new resident feels at home. The right items can bring comfort, maintain a sense of identity, and help staff provide personalised care from day one. This article offers a practical checklist of things to consider taking, each with a reason why it matters.

Essential documents and personal information

Before any personal belongings, the first priority is paperwork. The care home will need up-to-date records to provide safe and appropriate care. Pack a folder containing the person's medical history, a list of current medications (including dosages and times), any allergies, and details of their GP and any specialists they see. Also include a copy of their Lasting Power of Attorney, if one exists, and any advance care directives. Having these documents ready from the start avoids delays in care and gives the team a complete picture of the person's needs.

Clothing that works for daily life

Clothes are about more than just covering the body; they are about comfort, dignity, and personal style. The key is to choose items that are easy to put on and take off, yet still reflect the person's taste. Think about front-opening tops, elasticated waistbands, and slip-on shoes with good grip. Avoid complicated fastenings like small buttons or fiddly zips that can frustrate someone with limited dexterity. It is also wise to pack several changes of comfortable day clothes and a few smarter outfits for visits or social events. Label every item clearly with the person's name; laundry can easily get mixed up in a communal setting.

Familiar items from home

A care home bedroom can feel impersonal at first. Familiar objects can transform it into a personal space that feels safe and familiar. Consider bringing a favourite armchair, a small table or chest of drawers, and a lamp with a soft, warm bulb. Photographs of family, friends and pets are powerful reminders of happy times. A small collection of the person's favourite books, a radio tuned to their preferred station, or a tablet loaded with their favourite music or films can also provide comfort and entertainment. Even a familiar cushion or throw blanket can make a bed feel more like their own.



Toiletries and personal care items

Maintaining a routine of personal care helps preserve dignity and a sense of normality. Pack the person's regular toiletries: their usual shampoo, soap, moisturiser, toothpaste, and a soft toothbrush. If they have a favourite brand of deodorant or a particular scent they like, include that too. For anyone with sensitive skin, using their own products reduces the risk of irritation. Also include a hairbrush or comb, nail clippers, and any aids they use for grooming, such as a long-handled sponge or a razor. A small mirror and a hand mirror are useful for anyone who wants to check their appearance.

Items for hobbies and interests

Keeping engaged in activities that the person enjoys is important for mental well-being. If they loved gardening, a small potted plant or a window box can be a source of pleasure. If they enjoyed knitting, crossword puzzles, or painting, bring the materials they need. A digital photo frame can cycle through family pictures without the clutter of many frames. A tablet or

smartphone loaded with simple games or apps can also provide stimulation, but make sure it is set up with large text and simple controls. The care home staff can often help residents stay involved in their interests, so having the right tools to hand makes it easier.

Special dietary needs and snacks

Many care homes cater for a wide range of dietary requirements, but having a supply of the person's favourite snacks can be a comfort. If they have specific dietary needs such as gluten-free, diabetic-friendly, or soft foods, discuss this with the home's catering team in advance. A small supply of easy-to-eat snacks like biscuits, fruit, or pre-cut vegetables can be kept in their room. A thermos flask for hot drinks can also be useful if the person likes to have a cup of tea or coffee at a time that suits them, rather than only at set mealtimes.

Mobility aids and safety equipment

If the person uses a walking stick, a frame, or a wheelchair, make sure these are clearly labelled with their name. A small bag attached to the walking frame can hold a phone, glasses, or a purse. For those who are at risk of falls, a falls alarm or a personal alarm pendant can be worn. The care home will have its own equipment for safety, but if the person has a favourite chair that helps them stand up, bring that along. A non-slip mat for the bathroom floor is a small addition that can prevent accidents.



Communication and connection

Staying connected with family and friends is vital for emotional health. If the person is comfortable with technology, a tablet or a smartphone set up with large icons and simple calling apps can help them make video calls. A landline phone in their room, if allowed, can also be a good option. A notice board by the door can display cards, photos, and a calendar of visits. For anyone with hearing or vision loss, bring their hearing aids and spare batteries, or their glasses and a magnifying glass. A talking clock or a large-print calendar can help them keep track of time and appointments.

Making the room feel like home

The room itself can be personalised with a few thoughtful touches. A favourite quilt or bedspread, a small rug, and a cushion from home can make the space feel warm and familiar. A wall-mounted photo gallery or a shelf for treasured ornaments can create a sense of continuity. A small plant or a vase of fresh flowers adds life and colour. If the person enjoys the outdoors, a bird feeder placed outside the window can provide daily entertainment. The goal is to make the room a place where the person feels they belong, not just a room in a building.

Working with the care team

The Green Care Group understands that a move into a care home is a big step, and they work with families to make the transition as smooth as possible. Their team can offer guidance on what to bring and how to settle in. It is a good idea to talk to the home's manager before the move to check if there are any restrictions on what can be brought, such as electrical items or furniture. They may also have a list of suggested items that they find particularly useful. Building a good relationship with the care team from the start helps everyone work together for the resident's comfort and well-being.

What to leave behind

Not everything needs to come. Large pieces of furniture that do not fit the room, valuable jewellery, and large collections of clothes or books can be left with family or donated. The care home will have its own laundry service, so there is no need to pack a washing machine. It is also wise to leave behind any items that could be a trip hazard, such as loose rugs or trailing cables. The focus should be on quality over quantity; a few well-chosen items have more impact than a room full of clutter.



Final practical points

Label everything clearly with the person's name, using a permanent marker or sewn-in labels. Make a list of everything you bring and keep a copy for yourself. Check with the home about their policy on electrical items; some may require a PAT test before use. If the person has a pet that cannot come with them, consider arranging regular visits from the pet or using a pet-visiting scheme if the home allows it. The most important thing is to involve the person in the decisions where possible, so they feel a sense of ownership over their new space. Moving into a care home is a change, but with the right preparation, it can be a positive new chapter.

The Green Care Group on social media Facebook