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Living

# Oxford Living's Guide to Senior Living

LIFE IS BETTER HERE.

## Welcome to The Sandwich Generation!

The American Psychiatric Association describes the sandwich generation as women, aged 35-54, taking care of both children and aging parents and suggests that 45% of us are under extreme stress.

Extreme stress feels like an understatement. And thinking all this fun could all be over by 54 seems like a pipe dream! Can we really see our parents' needs becoming less onerous, our kids moving out; partnering up; getting a great job; staying married or employed; and becoming financially independent by the time we reach (or for some of us, have reached) the age of 54. Seriously? With parents living longer and kids living with us longer, membership in the sandwich generation is more like being in a street gang – you can get in, but you can't get out!

The truth is for many of us, we've become so good at putting the needs of our parents, our kids and our spouses ahead of our own that so often that we barely know what to do with a free evening, a spare room or a little extra money. Most days we wouldn't trade the opportunity to care for our aging parents, kids, spouses, grandkids, pets and the like.

But sometimes our parents' needs become beyond what we can provide.

Choosing to move a parent into a retirement home was never an easy task and then throw in a COVID-19 pandemic, and a task that was already confusing can become even more perplexing and downright scary.

How do you even start to explore living options available to a parent in need? In fact, do you even start? Are retirement homes and or long term care ("LTC") facilities still safe in the midst of this, the global pandemic? When is the right time for Mom or Dad to move out of their home? What if they don't want to leave? Where do you even start the conversation?

Most retirement homes and long term care facilities are absolutely the safest places for elderly Canadians.

Read this Guide and You'll Discover:

- **10 Telltale Signs Your Parent Should No Longer Be Living Alone**
- **5 Tips for Moving Your Parent to A Retirement Home**
- **5 Costly Misconceptions about Senior Living In the Face of COVID-19**

We wrote this guide to help you better understand Retirement Living and with the information in the following pages you can make an informed, intelligent decision.

If you have questions about retirement living, please call us at **289-407-8716**  
or email **[tfoster@oxfordliving.ca](mailto:tfoster@oxfordliving.ca)**.



# Ten Telltale Signs Your Parent Should No Longer Be Living Alone



Moving your Mom or Dad into a retirement home can be an extremely difficult decision, (especially during COVID-19!). One of the biggest challenges we face is knowing whether or not it's the time to make the move.

It is very difficult to see your Mom or Dad suddenly unable to take care of themselves properly. It often creates feelings of guilt and responsibility when you realize you can't give them that care yourself. But how do you know when it is time to have the conversation?

Let's face it, most people are less than enthused about the prospect of leaving their home and giving up what they feel is their last little bit of independence and dignity. The truth is, most seniors actually thrive when they move to a retirement home. Some of the benefits include regular nutritious meals, medication compliance, socialization, and an enhanced quality of life enjoying a clean safe maintenance free lifestyle.



*The following is a list of ten subtle changes that indicate the safety of your parent could be compromised:*

## **1. MEMORY LOSS**

We all lose memory as we age. From time to time we may misplace our keys or forget a name or address without concern. What is a bigger worry however, is when memory loss affects more recent and important issues. Behaviours such as asking the same question over and over, getting lost in familiar places, an inability to follow instructions or being confused about locations, times or normally familiar people.

## **2. THE HOUSE BECOMES HAZARDOUS**

Living in an environment that was previously acceptable can quickly become hazard-filled for an older parent. Clutter, loose rugs, excitable pets, power cords and other dangers could lead to a fall. If slippery surfaces, uneven, winding or steep outdoor paths, stairs or even moving normally about the house seems to put your parent in danger, this should be a red flag.

Pay close attention if you notice a parent has difficulty reaching dishware, difficulty using the microwave, becomes forgetful turning off the oven or stovetop, and/or has difficulty following instructions with medications. Worrisome things like missed medications, dropped dishes or glasses. Many of these hazards can be managed or risks mitigated without moving your parent to a retirement home, however, others cannot and sometime when exploring these risks collectively the danger could be considerable.

## **3. UNCLEAN LIVING SPACE**

If your parents' home is untidy and odorous there may be issues with their physical ability to clean up after themselves. Some seniors find it difficult to do things they used to be able to manage alone; vacuuming, doing dishes, making or changing beds, doing laundry, cooking, buying and putting away groceries. It is often useful to make note of food and food preparation. Look in the fridge and cupboards for spoiled food, foods past their expiry dates, or simply a lack of food.

## **4. WEIGHT LOSS**

Weight loss in older people can be a sign of problems with physical health, mental health or both. Weight loss could be the result of a serious health condition such as cancer, dementia or depression but could also be due to things like difficulty preparing and cooking food, loss of taste or smell, loss of appetite, financial or socio-economic issues.



## 5. CHANGE IN MOOD, SPIRITS OR PERSONALITY

We all get sad sometimes and older adults are no stranger to hardship but clinical depression is not a natural product of aging. Many seniors maintain a happy outlook most or all of the time. If your parent's mood, spirit or personality change lasts longer than you'd consider normal it could indicate clinical depression.

## 6. MANAGING FINANCES

Many seniors find it difficult to keep up with their financial responsibilities. Some conditions like dementia can also affect seniors' ability to think abstractly and handle numbers on a complex level.

When a parent is finding it difficult to handle daily finances or is becoming more susceptible to financial mistakes, the consequences can be severe and if unchecked can result in higher interest rates, fees and penalties; damaged credit rating, utility shut off or even eviction. Sadly, they may also fall victim to scams and get cheated out of large amounts of money.

## 7. LOSS OF INTEREST IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The global pandemic has reduced our collective levels of social activity and seniors are vulnerable to suffering from feelings of isolation. It is important to make sure your parent is remaining as active as possible, connecting with family and friends, maintaining hobbies and participating in the activities they enjoy. The restrictions that have been imposed due to COVID-19 affect many activities that were once an important part of seniors' daily lives. A lost interest in being socially-active is another red flag.

## 8. MOBILITY ISSUES

Aging can lead to muscle loss and muscle-weakening, balance and coordination issues, stiffness and joint pain where even getting out of a chair for a short walk can become problematic or impossible.

Losses in mobility can have profound social, psychological, and physical consequences. When a parent can't get around, they can suddenly feel dependent, relying on other people to take them places, and can become reclusive and depressed. With immobility, there can be an increased risk of incontinence (as it is difficult to get to the bathroom) which can potentially lead to urinary and skin infections.

The loss of mobility puts you at greater risk for falls, which may result in hip fractures. Beyond the pain and suffering, such fractures are life altering to seniors because some 20% of people with hip fractures die from complications within a year.

Physicians can quickly assess a parent's mobility with the "Get Up and Go Test", where they ask the patient to get out of a chair, walk ten yards and turn around. They typically assess the speed, stability and steadiness of the senior. It is also important to assess your parent and keep an eye out for changes.

## 9. DIFFICULTY DRIVING

Often as we age, slower reflexes, diminished vision, and hearing, as well as increased confusion can make driving more challenging. Given the potential for damage, injury and loss from even a minor accident, it is critical to monitor and assess your parent's driving ability regularly and be prepared to step in where necessary. Dents, dings, scratches, scrapes, tickets, warnings or mishaps tend to be signs that an intervention is required. For many seniors, driving is the last piece of their independence and in smaller towns, life without wheels can seem unbearable. Setting boundaries and having discussions with your parent about other options ahead of time are critical.

## 10. DIFFICULTY MANAGING SELF-CARE

Pay attention for signs of self-neglect such as poor hygiene, sloppy dressing, wearing the same outfit day after day and unkempt appearance as indicators that could point to an issue. Another notable sign of poor hygiene is when there is continually no laundry – clothes, towels, washcloths. This is always a sure sign that proper cleaning, bathing is not happening. Managing your personal appearance and running a household can be a challenge for the best of us but difficulties and challenges in personal care or managing one's affairs are often indicative of a more prevalent issue.

*Remember, these are a fairly universal set of challenges facing all of our parents as they age, so any minor or gradual challenges or deficiencies here shouldn't cause alarm. The issue is to focus on these areas as a continuum, establish a baseline and note rapid changes or severity of the specific issues.*





# 5 Tips for Moving Your Parent To A Retirement Home ...and still feel good about yourself



## 5 Tips For Moving a Parent to A Retirement Home Without Feeling Guilty

Being involved in a process to move a parent or in-law through a difficult life-change like giving up their car or moving out of their home typically creates a broad spectrum of emotion, in a parent. These range from anger to denial to guilt and frustration toward you and your siblings, their spouse, physicians and others involved in the process. Without question underlying family dynamics run deep during these trying times and push us all into old patterns.

One of the most contentious and guilt inducing decisions is whether retirement living is in a loved one's best interest. Even when a parent's needs clearly exceed what can be provided by family or other caregivers, determining that a move is necessary is commonly accompanied by a sense of defeat. If the decision to move a parent is also in your own best interest then the guilt looms even larger. Here are a few tips to help reduce the guilt you might be feeling:

### TIP #1

**Remember you are not the cause of your parent's illnesses or age-related decline.**

In age-related issues or progressive illness, it is often important to remind yourself that you are not the reason for your parent's state of health. There is a tendency for us to absorb complete responsibility for a parents' condition. With cognitive decline, depression or certain illnesses, parents can become angry, frustrated and unreasonable in their current situation and in efforts to problem-solve and find viable options. It sounds intuitive but there can be great value in reminding yourself and your parent that you are there for them, that you did not cause their condition and you are trying to help them make the best decision available for them.

### TIP #2

**Realize that professional care is often a necessary next step.**

While there can be many helpful programs (some even provided through the Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) at no charge) to provide care to a parent in their own home that can supplement efforts by you, along with family and friends – a retirement home is designed to provide increased safety, comfort, and quality of life. Around the clock support, professional nursing care and social stimulation and activities can be delivered cost effectively in a care setting. It is important to keep in mind that professional help is also necessary for you to avoid caregiver burnout and have a life and relationships outside of caregiving.

## TIP #3

### Remind yourself and thank yourself for doing the best you can.

Being a primary caregiver is a massive responsibility and often not a job we have had any training for, nor one we likely signed up for. You are asked to make decisions about situations you have never encountered before and handle matters that often seem akin to picking the lesser of two evils. You have taken on a difficult role and are doing your best to make decisions and provide support based on the information and resources you have. Take a breath, thank and appreciate yourself -even if your parent is not in a place to say it or fully appreciate all the work and stress they might be causing you.

## TIP #4

### Understand you can't live your life for someone else.

Even the world's best and dedicated caregivers can only help so much. Everyone needs a break from the stress, pressure and demands of providing care. Sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations of us (often times for reasons they can't help). Other times they reject care from others or refuse assistance from anyone at all, not realizing this puts the burden back on you. Remember, by taking care of and providing for your loved one 24/7, you are likely enabling them to believe they are doing it all on their own.

## TIP #5

### Quit feeling like you have failed.

Moving your parent in to a retirement home does not mean you have failed to take care of them. It means you are making a smart, responsible decision to keep them safe and provide them with the care based on their 'needs'.

Now instead of time spent worrying about things in the home, you have quality time as you can spend as much time as you like just talking, visiting (in the post-vaccine world we all dream of), taking your parent to your house and appointments. You are continuing to manage and take great care of your parent and you definitely have not abandoned them.





## 5 Costly Misconceptions about Retirement Homes



*Retirement homes are probably one of today's most misunderstood types of businesses.*



Modern independent and assisted living facilities are relatively new concepts having come to light in Canada over the past 30 (or so) years. However, facilities and institutions catering to the elderly have been around forever. The issue is that many of our parents recall highly-institutionalized nursing homes of 'yore' or homes for the aged of years ago. Work lies ahead for Retirement homes in dispelling old perceptions. Many prospective residents express disbelief at how very far our retirement home is from what they were expecting. Our home, and others just like us, offer residents much more than simply age-related support – things like chef prepared meals, live entertainment, creative daily activities – make our home feel, at times, more like a Caribbean vacation destination than a Retirement home. However, a number of legacy ideas remain and without question senior living itself retains a stigma.

*The following are some of the misconceptions that we typically encounter from prospective residents and families:*

### **MYTH #1: Retirement Homes Are Expensive.**

Like any real estate options, Retirement homes can be expensive particularly in larger suites or where higher levels of care are required. You could definitely feel a bout of ‘sticker-shock’ when you are presented with a monthly rate, in even the most cost-effective home. But the truth is, the total cost of homeownership is significant (even when your parent has paid off their mortgage) and senior living tends to be comparable to them receiving the same services at home. Insurance, taxes, repairs and maintenance, emergency expenses, groceries and the like all add up. In a Retirement home these are all included at one rate – not to mention the added benefit of social activities, entertainment, housekeeping, laundry and care services as your parent requires. Plus the added comfort of 24 hour response by trained health care professionals in the event that something goes wrong.

### **MYTH #2: The Food is Terrible.**

One of the most overlooked benefits of senior living is the consistent nutritious, delicious chef-prepared meals and plentiful snacks. Our culinary team works hard to come up with creative, fresh and delicious meals and snacks that are tasty and flavourful, yet suitable for an older person’s system. There are also a number of modifications that can be made when required and getting feedback from residents on dishes they love and those they don’t care for. Furthermore, at each meal there are options to substitute should a resident so choose. The food is one of the best parts of our home and we aim to make your parent agree.

### **MYTH #3: There Is No Privacy In a Retirement Home.**

Many visitors to Retirement homes are surprised to learn the extent to which residents’ privacy is maintained. Retirement homes are just that – homes, not institutions or hospitals. Suite doors are locked and the keys are controlled by residents. Unless our staff are providing some planned and mutually agreed upon service, they do not enter a residents’ suite. Direct and personal care, bathing, dressing, or housekeeping are all examples of care that is expected to be delivered behind closed doors. Just like being in the community, residents’ personal information and/or medical history, details, etc. are only shared with a resident or the power of attorney. Unwanted visitors, door-to-door salespeople and the like are not permitted in our home and we try our best to prevent unwanted online and telephone contact (primarily through education and discussion as we can not monitor residents’ online lives or telephone calls). Your parent will feel at home, completely independent, private and absolutely secure in their environment. This said, your parent is welcome and encouraged to socialize and get to know other residents, families and friends and they’re welcome to have any visitors they would like to their suite (subject to visitor and COVID-19 policies).



*“...some become more independent in a Retirement home than they had been in their own home in many years.”*

### **MYTH #4: You Lose Your Independence in A Retirement Home.**

This is probably the biggest misconception that potential residents have about moving into a retirement home – that they will lose some or all their independence. The truth is, your parent can live as independently as they would like and, in fact, some become more independent in a retirement home than they had been in their own home in many years.

Residents may not make all the decisions and choices themselves if medical conditions or cognitive issues decline. We align our team with resident's medical professionals and families/caregivers to encourage or discourage some things – but we work hard to accommodate not only a resident's needs – but their preferences, wishes and wants.

Your parent is allowed to come and go as they please. They can continue to drive their own car (or as in the case of a particular resident up until a few years ago) their own motorcycle, provided they have the cognitive ability to do so. Residents can still make their own decisions, doing many of the things that they did at home. They are adults and allowed to make decisions about their lives. Some residents drink alcohol, others smoke (although we really try to discourage this!), residents order take-out, and some even strike up romantic relationships with other residents. Residents use “bowling words”, they tell dirty jokes, some stay in their pajamas on cold days and sometimes they eat cookies and ice cream for dinner. Provided they understand what they are doing, and it is safe for them, their fellow residents and our staff, residents are not forced to do anything they do not want to do, nor are they prohibited from doing things they like or enjoy.

### **MYTH #5: Older People Shouldn't Move Until They Need Help Taking Care of Themselves.**

It is a common myth that senior living is only for people who require daily care or need assistance with daily activities. Many seniors move into retirement homes on their own terms and control and enjoy the convenience and carefree lifestyle. They also enjoy peace of mind knowing they can stay in a retirement home and add support and care they may need down the road. Waiting until an illness or crisis occurs, or moving from hospital tends to lead to a much more stressful, rushed process, with a potential for fewer options and unfortunately sometimes, there is less opportunity for input from your parent.



## THE TIME FOR SENIORS TO CONSIDER RETIREMENT LIVING HAS NEVER BEEN BETTER

In our experience, families tend to wait too long to move a parent in to a retirement home. In the face of telltale signs, they need help, you can run the risk of missing what we call the “window of independence”.

By letting a parent “wither” for the sake of keeping them in their own home a few different scenarios could impact their health and wellness. Some examples include, their nutrition and diet might be poor leading to nutrient deficiencies and weight-loss. They could sustain a fall or accident and spend time recovering in hospital. They could suffer from depression and or forget to take medication. Quite often we will assess a person who was relatively independent but, in our opinion, living alone too long. They may have suffered through some type of crisis event, or their level of acuity has become too high (or beyond affordability) in traditional independent supportive or assisted living -forcing the senior to move to Long Term Care or stay in hospital.

We fundamentally believe that the time for seniors to consider Retirement living has never been better. In addition, the safety and security of 24-hour response by trained staff members, care teams able to manage medication and provide direct care – we believe daily recreation, delicious home-cooked meals and an engaging social environments are more important than ever for seniors. Services tailored to resident’s individual needs, promotes health and wellness and can extend a resident’s ability to maintain a more independent level of health and wellness.

Depression, malnutrition, medication errors and falls or accidents in the homes can be life altering for seniors. A proactive move to a Retirement community can help to minimize these hazards. Contact us today if we can help provide information or help facilitate the conversation with your parent on considering retirement living.

