

## **Assisted Living: Debunking Your Fears**

What will it really be like to move to assisted living? Of course there is not a single experience to describe. Just as each person comes into the new living alternative with their unique story, history and expectations, every person will experience this life changing event in a different way.

Many people are reluctant to move and have unfounded fears based on pre-conceived notions. Change is never easy and most of us resist it, especially change to the unknown. Because assisted living communities are a relatively new idea to most seniors, most of what they know is based solely on what they've heard from friends or relatives or the old model convalescent home from thirty years ago.

Common misconceptions about the lifestyle of older adults living in assisted living communities include:

### **Fear 1:**

#### **I will lose my independence**

Facts:

Many residents who live in assisted living find that they are more independent than they were in their homes because:

- They have more time because they are free from housework and cooking.
- They now are able to go where and when they want using the transport of the senior housing provider instead of being at the mercy of friends and family for transportation.
- They are no longer housebound.
- Their activity is not restricted by the community.
- If they were caring for a spouse at home, they are now getting help from the staff of the community which allows them to get back to enjoying activities.

### **Fear 2:**

#### **I will have no privacy**

Facts:

For some, assisted living offers more privacy than home care because:

- The help is there only when you need it; no one is lingering around your space.
- You are free to live undisturbed in your own apartment, with your own private telephone and television.
- In most cases the mail is delivered to your own mailbox.
- Staff will have access to your apartment only with your permission.
- Your medical information is kept locked in a clinical file and may only be shared with your written permission.

**Fear 3:****It will be too expensive**

Facts:

- Assisted living is available in many price ranges.
- Care costs depend on how much care you need.
- Expenses at home such as property taxes, maintenance, groceries and utilities may cost more per month than an assisted living community.

**Fear 4:****I can't possibly live in that small apartment**

Facts:

- It may be easier to live in a smaller dwelling. As we age it becomes harder to maneuver stairs, outdoor areas and larger areas. Usually the bedroom, living room and kitchen become the rooms that we do the majority of our living in. Our formal dining rooms, guest bedrooms, and basements become storage rooms and clutter may begin to make life difficult.
- In assisted living a well designed simple space with a large private bathroom can simplify rather than stifle especially for people who are visually or mobility impaired. Often there is a large living room, a family dining room and game room outside the apartment that is always available for use.

**Fear 5:****I don't want to go to all those activities**

Facts:

- It is totally possible to live in assisted living and never go to one activity. The activity programs are all voluntary.
- Although, many times people begin to join in with friends they make at the community.

**Fear 6:****I will be separated from my life long friends**

Facts:

- You may invite your friends for dinner, a game of bridge, a birthday party or a concert.
- In some communities you may arrange for transportation to visit friends or relatives.
- Most communities have private dining rooms where you can entertain.

**Fear 7:****The food will be awful**

Dining services in assisted living communities vary tremendously. This can be one of the more difficult decisions, especially if you have become accustomed to your own cooking. Finding the right fit for your appetite and eating habits is crucial.

Facts:

- The food is fresh, well prepared and snacks may be available 'round the clock.

- You may have a kitchen in your apartment and want to prepare some meals on your own.
- Your voice is important; make your culinary desires known to the management or the chef.

**Fear 8:**

**I am not old and sick but everyone else is**

Facts:

- Many people move to assisted living because they want to feel more secure about living alone at home not because they are sick.
- The majority of residents are not ill even if they have impairments or chronic conditions but
- Residents are not bedridden or infirm.
- The age range at each community is different but most residents are between their late 70's and 80's. Although, as people are living longer, we see people ranging from their mid-sixties into their 100's within assisted living.
- Many residents can be quite youthful regardless of their age.

It's important to visit a community several times before choosing to live there. You will "feel" the age of the population.

**When facing the challenge of moving to assisted living try to keep an open mind. You may come to enjoy it in ways you could have never imagined.**