

Nursing Home Neglect: Preventing It and Getting Help

Neglect is the failure to provide goods and services to a resident that are necessary to **avoid physical harm, pain, mental anguish, or emotional distress**. That could include the failure to provide the staffing, supplies, services, or staff training to meet the resident's needs. Neglect may or may not be intentional.

A person living in a nursing home has the right to be free of abuse and neglect. Federal law requires nursing homes to provide each resident the services and activities to "attain or maintain [their] highest practicable physical, mental, and psychosocial well-being."

Signs of Neglect include:

- Pressure ulcers or pressure sores
- Malnutrition or unexplained weight loss
- Dehydration
- Poor personal hygiene – bathing, nails dirty and unclipped, hair dirty and matted or uncombed, teeth or dentures not brushed or cared for
- Isolation – not offered or given the opportunity to interact or engage with others in the nursing home or in the community
- Failure to provide assistive devices – such as canes, wheelchairs, eyeglasses, dentures
- Frequent or untreated changes in condition, including illness and infection
- Over- or under-medicating
- Changes in demeanor – becoming withdrawn, depressed, angry
- Loss of abilities – such as walking, incontinence
- Unexplained injuries – bruises, broken bones, falls
- Unclean living conditions

Neglect is often the result of inadequate staffing in a nursing home. If there are not enough staff to care for the residents, then care and services are not provided, and mistakes are often made, or accidents occur. Lack of proper training is another factor that can lead to neglect due to care not being properly provided, as well as increased staff errors and accidents.



Red Flags of Neglect

-  The resident is dirty, unkempt
-  The resident's room or the facility is dirty
-  Changes in condition or demeanor
-  Loss of abilities, such as walking, using the bathroom, or interacting with others
-  Unexplained injuries, bruises, falls
-  Long wait times for the call bell to be answered
-  High staff turnover

These are red flags that could be cause for concern. Ask questions or get help.

Take Action to Report Neglect

When you are concerned about the care, or lack of care, being provided, **take action!**

Raise your concerns inside the nursing home

- ✔ **Talk to the staff who provide care.** Ongoing, early communication can keep minor problems from becoming serious and can help you build a good working relationship with staff. Ask for a care planning conference to review the care and services needed by the resident and ask how the nursing home is going to ensure the plan is followed.
- ✔ **File a complaint through the nursing home's grievance process.** Every nursing home must have a grievance process, a grievance official, and must provide that information to each resident. Whenever a resident files a grievance, the nursing home must provide a written summary of its investigation and its results, including any corrective action to be taken as a result of the grievance.
- ✔ **Raise your concerns to the Director of Nursing or Administrator.** If talking to the staff person directly involved does not resolve the problem, or you're finding the problems persist, ask to meet with someone with more authority, such as the Director of Nursing or the Administrator. Hear the nursing home out, but don't lose sight of your goal: the resident's well-being. The home may blame aides who call in sick, time-consuming paperwork, low reimbursement rates, etc. The nursing home is responsible, however, for ensuring that each resident receives the proper care and services. Ask how they will ensure that this happens for all residents.
- ✔ **Connect with the Resident or Family Council.** Resident and family councils may already be working on the issue or concerns you're raising, and you will find out how widespread the problems may be. These councils can also present concerns to the facility, and according to law, the facility must act on council complaints. If the nursing home does not have a family council, start one yourself. Get more information about family councils at theconsumervoice.org/issues/family/family-council-center.

Get help from outside the nursing home

- ✔ **Contact the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.** Long-term care ombudsmen are advocates for individuals living in long-term care facilities. They are trained to resolve problems and can assist with complaints.
- ✔ **File a complaint with your State's Licensing Agency.** In every state this agency monitors or regulates licensed nursing homes. You can file a complaint to prompt an investigation.

To find an Ombudsman in your area, or your State's Licensing Agency, go to theconsumervoice.org/get_help.

