How to prepare for a move to respite care homes

Understanding what a short-term stay involves

A move into respite care homes is different from a permanent relocation. The stay is temporary, often measured in weeks rather than months, and the goal is to give the person receiving care a safe, supportive environment while their usual carer takes a break or handles other commitments. Because the stay is short, the preparation needs to be efficient and focused. You want the transition to feel smooth for everyone involved, without the drawn-out stress that can accompany a permanent move.

The first thing to recognise is that the person moving in may feel uncertain. Even if they understand the reasons, leaving a familiar home for a new setting, even temporarily, can be unsettling. The practical steps you take before moving day can make a real difference in how they settle. The aim is to create a sense of familiarity within a new space, so the person feels comfortable from the moment they arrive.

Step one: Gather information about the home

Before you pack a single bag, make sure you have a clear picture of what the care home provides. Each home has its own approach to daily life, mealtimes, activities, and visiting arrangements. Ask for a written guide or talk through the daily schedule. Find out what furniture and bedding are provided in the room, and what you are expected to bring. Some homes supply everything including towels and toiletries; others expect you to bring personal items. Knowing this avoids last-minute dashes to the shops.

Also check the home's policy on personal belongings. Most homes welcome items that make the room feel personal, but there may be limits on electrical appliances for safety reasons. Ask about storage for valuables. You do not want to arrive with a suitcase full of items that cannot be used or stored safely.

At this stage, it is also worth understanding the home's approach to medical needs. If the person has regular medication, find out how the home manages it. Some homes take over all medication management; others expect you to bring supplies and work with you on a schedule. Clarifying this early prevents confusion on the day.



Step two: Prepare the person for the move

Talk through the move with the person who will be staying. Use clear, simple language about why the stay is happening and how long it will last. If the person has dementia, be especially careful with timing. Discussing the move too far in advance can cause anxiety, while leaving it too late can feel rushed. Aim for a few days before, when the details are fresh but there is still time to answer questions.

Involve them in decisions where possible. Let them choose which clothes to pack, which books or photos to bring, and what small comforts matter most. A favourite blanket, a familiar cushion, or a framed picture can transform an unfamiliar room into a space that feels like their own. The more control they feel over the process, the more at ease they are likely to be.

If the person is anxious, consider visiting the home beforehand. A short pre-visit to meet staff, see the room, and have a cup of tea in the lounge can remove much of the mystery. Many homes encourage this, and it is a simple step that reduces uncertainty on the day itself.

Step three: Pack thoughtfully, not excessively

Packing for a short stay is about balance. You need enough to feel at home, but not so much that the room becomes cluttered or that unpacking feels overwhelming. Start with the essentials:

- Clothing for the expected length of stay, plus a few extra changes. Think about layers, comfort, and easy dressing if mobility is limited.
- Toiletries and personal care items the person prefers. Even if the home provides basics, using a familiar shampoo or soap can be comforting.
- Any medication in clearly labelled containers, with a written list of doses and times. Keep a copy for yourself and give one to the care team.
- A small selection of personal items: photos, a clock, a radio or music player, books or magazines, and perhaps a favourite mug or teacup.
- Important documents: a list of emergency contacts, medical information, and any legal paperwork such as a power of attorney. Keep these in a folder the home can access if needed.

Label everything clearly with the person's name. Clothes, toiletries, and even small items can easily get mixed up in a communal setting. Use a permanent marker or printed labels. Avoid packing anything valuable or irreplaceable. A stay in a care home is generally safe, but items can be misplaced or damaged, and the stress of losing something precious is not worth the risk.

Step four: Plan the moving day itself

Moving day should feel as calm as possible. Aim to arrive at a time when the home is settled, often mid-morning after breakfast and morning routines. Rushing in at a busy time can add to everyone's stress. Allow plenty of time for settling in. Do not plan to leave immediately after dropping off the person and their belongings. Spend an hour or two helping them unpack, arranging the room, and meeting the staff who will be caring for them.

Introduce the person to the key staff members by name. If they have particular preferences or routines, this is a good moment to mention them. The staff want to provide personalised care, but they can only do that if they know what matters to the person. Small details, like a preference for tea over coffee or a habit of reading before bed, help build a routine from day one.

Stay for a meal if that feels appropriate. Sharing a meal in the dining room can normalise the environment and give the person a sense of belonging. It also gives you a chance to see the home's mealtime atmosphere and how staff interact with residents.



Step five: Settle in and stay connected

After the first day, the real settling begins. The person may need a few days to adjust. Some people take to a new environment quickly; others need more time. Be patient. It is normal for someone to feel a bit low or anxious at first. The staff are experienced in helping new residents feel welcome, but your continued involvement matters too.

Visit regularly, especially in the first week. Keep visits positive and relaxed. Bring a small treat or something to do together, like looking at photos or playing a simple game. If the person seems upset, do not take it personally. Reassure them that the stay is temporary and that you are still very much part of their life.

Stay in touch with the care team. They can give you honest updates on how the person is eating, sleeping, and engaging with activities. If something is not working, speak up. The team can often make small adjustments that improve the experience significantly.

What to watch for during the stay

Keep an eye on how the person is adapting. Signs of good adjustment include engaging with staff and other residents, eating reasonably well, sleeping adequately, and maintaining their usual mood. If you notice withdrawal, loss of appetite, confusion beyond what is normal for them, or distress that does not ease after a few days, raise it with the care team. Sometimes a simple change, like a different room location or a different activity time, can help.

Also watch for practical issues. Are the person's clothes being laundered properly? Are they getting the right medication at the right times? Is their room kept clean and at a comfortable temperature? These are basic expectations, and if something is off, it needs addressing. A short stay should not mean a drop in quality of care.

For families exploring their options, understanding how different homes operate can help you make an informed choice. Many providers, including The Green Care Group residential care homes, offer short-term stays that allow you to see the environment before committing to anything longer. These stays are designed to be flexible, supporting both the person receiving care and their family during a period of transition.

Step six: Plan for the return home

As the end of the stay approaches, think about what the person will return to. If the break was for your own rest, make sure you have had that rest. If practical changes have been made at home, ensure they are complete before the person comes back. A smooth return is as important as a smooth arrival.


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Talk to the care team about any observations they have made. They may have noticed changes in mobility, appetite, or mood that are worth discussing with a GP or other professional. Use their insight to adjust the home environment or care routine if needed.

When the person returns, allow a re-settling period. Things may feel different after even a short time apart. Be patient with each other. The break was meant to refresh both of you, and with good planning, it can do exactly that.

Respite stays are a practical tool for maintaining care arrangements over the long term. With thoughtful preparation, the experience can be positive for everyone. The key is to treat the move with the same care and attention you would give any important transition, while remembering that this one is designed to be temporary, supportive, and restorative.

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