

# How to Choose a Home Care Agency

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**Being a family caregiver can involve wearing many hats.** Whether you are caring for a spouse or a parent, your role may involve being a driver, cook, housekeeper, companion, health advocate, or financial planner, just to name a few. Avoiding caregiver burnout is so important but often overlooked, as most caregivers focus solely on the care recipient and not on themselves. As a family caregiver, you shouldn't feel shy about asking for extra help, whether that be from other family members or from professionals.

Private care is a growing industry, and with the multitudes of agencies offering home care support, knowing how to choose the right one can be an intimidating task. There are quite a few factors to consider when hiring a caregiver for the first time.

## **Why should you hire a caregiver?**

Hiring a caregiver can relieve some of the stress being experienced by family members who are trying to do all of the caregiving themselves. However, before making the step of hiring a caregiver, consider discussing the following within your family:

1. **Who is in your current care team?** This may be a mixture of family and friends. What are their caregiving contributions and how much more capacity do they have in terms of time and energy to help the care receiver? Is there someone who can take on a little more, or conversely, are the family members who are getting burnt out and need a little bit of relief?

2. **What are the tasks that the care receiver needs help with?** Everyone ages differently and therefore attention must be given to the exact tasks that require help. Some common tasks include transportation to appointments, medication reminders, housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, grocery shopping, outings and general companionship. Some may need help with personal care such as dressing, bathing and hygiene.

### **Finding a caregiver**

Once you have made the decision to hire a caregiver, choose one or two agencies that you may want to interview. An online search will produce a long list of possible agencies. Think about whether you want to hire a small local agency or one that is part of a larger national (or even international) group. Consider whether you have any special requirements for the caregiver, such as language skills, or prior experience with dealing with a particular illness or condition.



**Here are some questions that you may want to ask when interviewing a care agency:**

1. How long have you been in business?
2. What are the services that you offer and what do most of your clients hire you for?
3. Where do you find your staff?
4. What training have they received and what prior experience or certifications do you require from the people you hire?
5. Do you do criminal or background checks on the people that you hire?
6. How long has the average caregiver been working on your team?
7. What are your hourly rates?
8. How will the family be kept informed of what goes on during the visits by the caregiver?
9. What will the agency do if one of the caregivers calls in sick or has an emergency?
10. Do you have any references of current or past clients that I can speak with?

Once the agency has matched one of their caregivers to the person requiring care, try to attend one of the visits in the first week to observe the interactions between the caregiver and the care receiver. If you don't feel the personality and skill set of the caregiver are the right match for your loved one, don't be shy about asking the agency to send someone else.

**Finding the right caregiver can lead to many benefits** – the development of a friendship between the caregiver and care receiver, added safety and security inside the home to allow the senior to continue living at home, and decreased stress for family.