

Hiring a Home Health Aide: A Guide for Family Caregivers

Watching a parent or spouse struggle with things they once did easily is painful. In most families, adult children or spouses are the first to step in — it's natural to want to help.

But over time, your loved one's needs may increase. And when you're juggling work, children, and personal commitments, or coping with your own health concerns, [caregiving can become overwhelming](#).

You might feel guilty for not being able to do it all yourself, or nervous about trusting a stranger in your loved one's home. These feelings are normal. To avoid burnout, family caregivers need support. One of the best ways to get that support is by hiring a home health aide, sometimes called a personal care assistant.

Finding the right person brings peace of mind, but it takes time and planning. This guide walks you through how to assess your needs, understanding the difference between using an agency or hiring an individual, and asking the right questions to keep the person in your care safe.

[Contact Us to Start Care](#)

Step 1: Understand Your Loved One's Care Needs

Before you begin looking for an aide, look closely at daily routines and challenges. Understanding what help is needed will make it easier to find the right support.

Assess Activities of Daily Living

Many families first notice that everyday tasks are becoming harder to manage. Activities of daily living, or ADLs, are the basic self-care tasks people need to be able to do to live safely at home:

- **Personal Hygiene:** Does your loved one need help bathing, grooming, or using the bathroom? You'll want to look for someone who knows how to handle intimate tasks with dignity.
- **Mobility:** Do they need help getting out of bed, walking, or transferring from a wheelchair to a chair?
- **Nutrition:** Do they need help preparing meals? Are there specific dietary requirements or cultural food preferences?
- **Medication:** Do they forget to take their pills? Home health aides can remind your loved one when it's time to take them.

Identify Safety Risks at Home

Safety concerns are one of the main reasons families hire help. Older adults are at [high risk for falls](#), especially in homes with:

- Stairs
- Slippery bathrooms
- Poor lighting
- Cluttered walkways

A certified aide with training in mobility issues can help prevent falls and provide supervision during daily activities.

Consider Culture, Routine, and Personality

Good caregiving goes beyond physical help. Think about what matters most to your loved one and the activities they enjoy. For example:

- Is there a language they prefer to speak?
- What is their daily routine?
- Do they observe religious or cultural traditions?

What Does a Home Health Aide Do?

A home health aide helps with everyday tasks so someone can stay safe and comfortable at home. This can include help with bathing, dressing, meals, and

moving around the home.

Aides also provide supervision and can notice changes in health or behavior. They may share updates with a nurse or care team when needed.

Certified home health aides often work through licensed home care agencies. You can also hire someone independently, such as through word of mouth or on an online platform.

[Learn About Home Health Aide Services](#)

Step 2: What to Look for in a Home Health Aide

A [home health aide](#) does more than assist with daily tasks. The right aide can help someone stay safe, comfortable, and independent. When choosing an aide, look for a combination of training, reliability, and compassion.

Compassion and Communication

Technical skills matter, but personality matters too. A good aide treats your loved one with:

- Dignity
- Patience
- Respect

Strong communication skills also help families stay informed about changes in health or behavior.

Training and Certification

In New York State, home health aides must complete a Department of Health–approved training program.

Look for certified aides educated in:

- Safe transfers and mobility assistance
- Meal preparation and [special diets](#)
- Infection control and hygiene
- Recognizing warning signs that health may be changing

Some agencies also provide additional training beyond state requirements.

Health and Safety Standards

Professional agencies often require:

- Health screenings
- Immunizations
- Drug testing

These safeguards help protect older adults who may have weaker immune systems.

Compatibility

Beyond skills and training, fit also matters. A good match can make someone feel more comfortable and supported. It can also make daily routines easier.

When thinking about compatibility, consider:

- **Personality:** Will your loved one prefer someone who is talkative or more quiet?
- **Communication style:** Are they direct, or do they take a more relaxed approach?
- **Language:** Is there a preferred language for speaking and understanding care?
- **Culture and routines:** Are there cultural traditions or daily habits that matter?
- **Flexibility:** Can the aide adjust to changing needs or preferences over time?

If the fit does not feel right, it is okay to ask for a change. Finding the right match can take time.

Step 3: How to Hire an Aide

Once you understand what to look for, the next step is deciding how to hire. Most families choose one of two options:

- Work with a licensed home care agency that provides private pay home health aides
- Hire an aide independently

Both approaches can work, but they come with different responsibilities.

Working with a Licensed Home Care Agency

A licensed home care agency manages many of the details involved in arranging care.

Agencies typically:

- Screen aides by checking references, work authorization, and certification
- Provide nurse oversight, including an initial assessment and care plan
- Offer backup coverage if an aide is unavailable
- Carry insurance that protects both the aide and your household

Agencies also help match aides based on:

- Care needs
- Language and cultural preferences
- Personality and communication style

This can make it easier to find someone who is a good match.

Hiring an Aide Independently

Some families hire someone they know or find through word of mouth. This may feel more personal, and in some cases, less expensive.

When you hire an aide on your own, you take on the role of employer. This means you may be responsible for:

- Conducting background checks
- Managing payroll and taxes
- Providing insurance coverage
- Handling scheduling and backup care

If the aide is sick or cannot work, you may need to find a replacement on short notice.

You may also need to interview several candidates to find the right fit.

Step 4: How to Find the Right Aide

Once you've decided whether to use an agency or hire on your own, the next step is finding the right aide. If you work with an agency, a care coordinator can help match you with someone who fits your needs.

These guidelines will help you find the right aide.

Prepare a Job Description

This doesn't need to be complicated — just create a clear list of tasks. You might include:

- Shower assistance in the morning
- Medication reminders at specific times
- Meal preparation
- Help transferring to and from a wheelchair

Clear expectations help agencies match you with an aide who can properly care for your loved one.

Plan How You Will Communicate

This is important whether you go with an agency or an individual. Decide:

- Who will be the main contact in your family
- How the agency or aide should reach you
- What to do in an emergency

Questions to Ask a Home Care Agency

Before signing a contract or starting services, it helps to ask a few key questions:

- Is the agency licensed in New York State?
- Does a registered nurse supervise care?
- How do you screen and train aides?
- Are aides insured and bonded?
- How do you handle absences?
- How do you match aides with clients?
- What if the aide isn't a good fit?

How VNS Health Supports Family Caregivers

Licensed home care agencies can help families find certified home health aides while managing screening, supervision, and scheduling.

VNS Health matches families with aides based on care needs, preferences, and personality compatibility.

Care is coordinated by a team that may include nurses and care coordinators who monitor changing needs and adjust care plans over time.

Step 5: Adjusting to Care at Home

Even when families feel confident about their choice, bringing an aide into the home can be a big adjustment. It is normal for older adults to worry about losing independence or privacy — or admitting they need help. Here are ways to ease the process.

Start Slowly

If your situation isn't urgent, starting with a few hours helps your loved one adjust. You might start with companionship or help with household tasks like cooking before moving to personal care. Over time, care can expand to personal assistance if needed.

Involve the Person Needing Care

When possible, include your loved one in the process. Find out what qualities they think are important. Let them:

- Share preferences
- Meet the aide
- Help make decisions

Feeling involved can make the transition easier.

Monitor the First Few Weeks

During the early weeks, pay attention to how things are going. Check to see:

- Is the aide arriving on time?
- Does your loved one feel comfortable?

- Is the care meeting your expectations?

If something does not feel right, speak with the agency. Many agencies can adjust care plans or assign a different aide.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does a home health aide do?

A home health aide helps people with daily activities such as bathing, dressing, meal preparation, mobility, and medication reminders. Aides can provide companionship, and they also monitor safety and report health concerns to care supervisors.

What is the difference between a home health aide and a personal care aide?

Both roles provide assistance with daily activities. Training requirements and job responsibilities may vary depending on state regulations and the employer.

How much does a home health aide cost?

Costs vary based on location, hours of care, and whether you hire through an agency or independently. Some services may be covered by insurance or Medicaid programs.

Do home health aides provide medical care?

Home health aides do not perform medical procedures. They assist with personal care and daily tasks, while nurses or other clinicians provide medical care when needed.

How many hours of home care do people usually need?

Care plans vary widely. Some families need just a few hours of help each week, while others require daily or full-time support.

Source: <https://www.vnshealth.org/patient-family-support/guides/hiring-a-home-health-aide-a-guide-for-family-caregivers/>

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