



Guide to Holistic Health Care for Older Adults

A guide to the health care approach that addresses mind, body, and soul in the elderly and how to identify if an assisted living community uses a holistic approach to health care.

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Defining Holistic Health Care for Older Adults

Holistic health care focuses on the whole person. Dating back to the times of [Florence Nightingale](https://journals.lww.com/epidem/fulltext/2009/03000/Florence_Nightingale__Founder_of_Modern_Nursing.25.aspx),¹ the founder of modern nursing, holistic health care is at the science of nursing. She taught nurses to focus on the principles of holism of unity, wellness, and the link between human beings and their environment to bring a paired focus to their work.

Health care providers who recognize the benefits of holistic health care use both conventional practices and complementary approaches to address health care. Using an integrative approach to health care that combines traditional and non-traditional interventions for health and wellness ensures a focus on overall well-being rather just managing the illness.

¹ https://journals.lww.com/epidem/fulltext/2009/03000/Florence_Nightingale__Founder_of_Modern_Nursing.25.aspx

Benefits of Holistic Health Care

Seniors who receive holistic health care report [higher levels of hope](#),² dignity, self-discipline, social growth, a sense of autonomy, vigor, and vitality. Because holistic health care emphasizes holism and individualism rather than divided aspects of function or health, even elderly adults who are facing fatal illnesses describe being well, achieving personal goals, and living values, such as maintaining concern for loved ones, accomplishing meaningful work, and having fun.

Holistic health care teaches you how to use the connection between your body, brain, and mind to heal, cope, and be at peace with the many aspects of health and wellness that affect your overall outlook on life.



² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4441185/>



Providing Holistic Health Care in Assisted Living

When health care professionals have an open mind about whole person wellness versus illness, there's an increased opportunity to focus on your strengths and capabilities versus deficits and declines.

Approaches to Holistic Health Care

Holistic health care uses a wide range of approaches, including the use of natural products (such as tea), meditation, massage, aromatherapy, or other forms of complementary treatment. Holistic health care does not replace the need for conventional health care practices. Here are three different ways to receive holistic care in an [assisted living setting](https://info.highgateseniorliving.com/guide-to-assisted-living-facilities-ebook).³

³ <https://info.highgateseniorliving.com/guide-to-assisted-living-facilities-ebook>

1. Aromatherapy

[Aromatherapy](#)⁴ is the use of natural oils to enhance well-being. It's become a trusted tool, used at major health care systems across the U.S. such as [Fairview Health Services](#)⁵ and [Cleveland Clinic](#).⁶ It can reduce anxiety and pain, boost your mood and appetite, and promote sleep.

2. Massage

Massage therapy offers pain relief and can reduce anxiety and disruptive behaviors. A study using slow-stroke back massage found that physical expressions of agitation such as pacing, wandering, and resisting [decreased when slow-stroke massage was applied](#).⁷ Massage helps soothe anxiety or agitation and can help decrease stress.

3. Advocacy

Communication and [advocacy](#)⁸ are large components of holistic health care. The relationship between you and your health care provider is based on respect, openness, equality, and mutuality. You are considered the most important person when it comes to making choices that influence your health and well-being. Unlike a strictly conventional approach to health care, you are the leader of the team, and your medical team professionals are some of the invited players.

Another key element of holistic health is getting to know more about your values in life. Holistic health providers believe that you are the expert on your life, values, and priorities, and only you know what really matters to you. By understanding your needs, they can help you make choices that influence your health and well-being.

4 <https://naha.org/explore-aromatherapy/about-aromatherapy/what-is-aromatherapy/>

5 <https://www.fairview.org/blog/Common-Scents-And-Their-Powerful-Therapies>

6 <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/aromatherapy-can-help-ease-joint-pain/>

7 <https://www.amtamassage.org/publications/massage-therapy-journal/massage-research-seniors/>

8 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/highgate-holistic-health-care-the-role-of-advocacy-and-benefits-of-a-goal-driven-approach>

Using traditional medicine to prevent and treat illnesses for older adults is also a part of holistic health care. Common treatments include checkups, medicine, supplements, physical therapy, or perhaps surgery. Holistic health takes into consideration the effects of an illness on your entire life and your true needs instead of being concerned with only the disease.

Assisted living communities that prioritize holistic care focus on the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being of their residents

Social Well-being

Social isolation has been linked to serious consequences in elderly adults' health. These consequences can include increased mortality, quickly declining and lower overall cognitive performance, [depression symptoms](#),⁹ and increased blood pressure.



⁹ <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-warning-signs-of-depression-in-older-adults>

We're happier and our brains are healthier when we are connected and interact with others. Many assisted living communities offer activities and outings such as book discussions, card groups, walking clubs, or outings to local attractions that all encourage positive social relationships and improve your social well-being. When a new resident moves in, holistic health care assisted living communities ask about their interests, hobbies, and who they are as a person. They use this information to help customize the activities offered at the facility and try to partner the resident with someone else who may have similar interests.

Emotional Well-being

Our overall mood affects all other aspects of our health. The emotional well-being and mental health is especially important in elderly adults as they face unique life stressors. To get up and going every day, [we need to know that what we do matters](#).¹⁰ It's easy for seniors to lose their sense of purpose as they age. Living in an assisted living can encourage a consistent routine. There are activities throughout the day and socializing with other residents to stay on a busy schedule.

Although anxiety and depression are also common among seniors, holistic health treatments can help. Soothing or inspirational activities, such as spa baths, aromatherapy, massage, and meditation help ease anxiety and depression.

It's also been shown that [having a pet can provide a sense of responsibility and companionship](#).¹¹ Living in an assisted living community that allows pets can boost senior's overall well-being. Research shows that [pets can boost levels of serotonin](#),¹² the feel-good hormone, and reduce cortisol, the stress hormone.

10 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/3-ways-to-help-an-aging-parent-live-their-best-life-in-old-age>

11 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/5-benefits-of-owning-a-pet-as-a-senior>

12 http://www.nbcnews.com/id/4625213/ns/health-pet_health/t/puppy-love---its-better-you-think/

Holistic health care communities also offer opportunities for support groups. These groups provide an opportunity for residents to sort through their feelings in an environment where others may be experiencing the same emotional impacts aging has to offer.

Spiritual Well-being

People with purpose tend to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Elderly adults who engage in purpose-oriented activities develop rewarding relationships, experience great joy, and develop a general sense of well-being.

Assisted living facilities that take a holistic or wellness approach recognize that it's easy for seniors to lose a sense of meaning and purpose and offer places where you can turn for strength and comfort. Whether you turn to spiritual or religious faith, find comfort in nature, connect with art or music, or just want to help others, a holistic health care assisted living community allows you to explore what fulfillment looks like in later stages of life.



Identifying Holistic Health Care Facilities

Meeting social, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs can become more difficult as you age. If you are considering moving to an assisted living facility, it's important to find one that is committed to a holistic health care approach and will support you in obtaining and maintaining optimum health for your body, mind, emotions, and spirit.

Here are some questions to ask an assisted living facility that you may be considering:

- How does the assisted living community define “wellness?” Do they recognize and address the whole person?
- Do you feel like a valued person working as a partner with the assisted living facility? Do they seem to care about you, take your medical history personally, and show an interest in your family, lifestyle, and diet? Are there various treatment options that expand beyond conventional treatment?

- What approaches does the facility take to help residents achieve their full potential? Do they affirm their positive qualities and strengths?

Holistic health care identifies ways to treat an illness or disease as well as promote overall health and well-being.

Holistic Health Care at Highgate

Highgate Senior Living [practices a holistic](#)¹³ approach by taking alternative routes to medication including massage, aromatherapy, and [having a pet-friendly environment](#).¹⁴ Highgate also offers a [delicious, nutritious food program](#)¹⁵ in all its locations.

If you think Highgate Senior Living is a good option for your loved one, or want to learn more about Highgate and all it has to offer, [visit our website to learn more](#).¹⁶

13 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/a-behind-the-scenes-look-at-highgates-holistic-care-philosophy>

14 <https://blog.highgateseniorliving.com/assisted-living-facilities-offer-pet-friendly-environments>

15 <https://info.highgateseniorliving.com/senior-nutrition>

16 <https://www.highgateseniorliving.com/>



This guide is brought to you by Highgate Senior Living, an industry-leading assisted living and memory care provider offering a holistic approach to care. Pioneering change in the senior living industry, Highgate is committed to creating a unique and desirable living option where each resident can live a life of purpose.

Visit our website at www.highgateseniorliving.com to learn more.

Highgate Senior Living. Each Day to the Fullest.

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