



FIVE COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ASSISTED LIVING COMMUNITIES

By Janice Martin, Senior Living Specialist

If you haven't visited an assisted living community in a long time, you may be surprised! Today's communities look, feel, and even smell far differently than expected.

Misconception #1 – It's really old people

Age really doesn't have anything to do with whether a person needs assisted living. I have had 90-year-old residents with minimal care needs and are sharp as a tack. I have had 60-year-olds who had significant physical limitations or cognitive impairments.

Some residents are still working or volunteering! They have their own car and can come and go as they wish. They can go dancing at the town square or stay overnight with family. They enjoy the confidence of knowing if they need help, someone is there to assist them.

There is also the possibility of falling in love again! We had two residents get married at one of the communities where I worked! The wedding took place in the lobby, and all the staff contributed or attended. After the wedding, the new Mr. and Mrs. went on a cruise – and drove themselves to the ship!

It is undeniable that some people do require a lot of care. Communities have been designed so that people may age in place – meaning they might not have to move again if their care needs increase.

Misconception #2 – They're dark and depressing

Many of the new assisted living communities are bright and beautiful and rival fancy resorts. They hire interior designers to create beautiful spaces utilizing bright colors, beautiful textures, and lots of natural light.

They also have wonderful and unexpected amenities. They may have a pool, a bar to enjoy happy hour, movie theaters and stages for performances, multiple dining rooms – both formal and casual – and beautifully landscaped areas that include koi ponds, gazebos, and walking trails.

Misconception #3 – The people sit around doing nothing

Today's activities must meet the resident's mental and spiritual needs. Florida regulations state, "Scheduled activities must be available at least 6 days a week for a total of not less than 12 hours per



week. Watching television is not an activity for the purpose of meeting the 12 hours per week of scheduled activities unless the television program is a special one-time event of special interest to residents of the facility." An example would be the Super Bowl.

Residents have the right to determine what activities are scheduled through monthly resident council meetings. Most communities offer a wonderful variety such as art classes, cooking demonstrations, live entertainment, day trips, games, exercise, and even happy hour. Sadly, many residents choose not to participate, which is their choice.

Misconception #4 – The food is terrible

As we age our taste buds will change. At some point we will no longer enjoy the same favorite dish and swear the recipe is different. Medications play a significant role in changing the way things taste.

Food is the biggest complaint in assisted living communities. Some say it's too salty or not salty enough. Some say it's too spicy or it's bland. They complain that the food is too cold or too hot. Some say there is too much food, while others want larger portions. It is impossible to please everyone.

Some special diets can be accommodated, such as vegetarian selections, sugar free and no sugar added. If a person is diabetic, an assisted living community cannot deny the resident's meal or dessert

selections. Mechanical soft or pureed diets can be accommodated. Special diets like vegan or gluten free might not.

Menus are overseen by a professional nutritionist but allow for the chef's creativity. Vegetables are fresh and often purchased locally. Bread is delivered daily or baked on the premises. Soups and desserts are often homemade. Food is rarely frozen or canned.

Misconception #5 – The caregivers are abusive

Sadly, our media will report abuse as if it were an everyday occurrence when the opposite is true. There are wonderful individuals who care for their residents every day. Communities must run criminal background checks, fingerprinting, and drug testing on every employee. Although there may be some terrible caregivers, they don't last long. Some may sound rough around the edges but have a heart of gold.

Families may ask to have cameras in the apartments, and it is up to the community's policy to approve or deny the request. If you see something that concerns you, say something to the appropriate staff person. As a word of caution, if another resident's family member shares a concern with you, it is important to not use the opportunity to spread rumors or make assumptions. There may be circumstances that are not disclosed.

Go to visit communities. Try their food, look at the activity calendar, and observe the amenities and surroundings. Above all, go with an open mind.

Senior Liaison of Central Florida helps individuals find an appropriate senior living community and will accompany you on a tour. For more information, call 352-477-1866 for a free consultation or email SeniorLiaisonCFL@gmail.com. Please visit our website at www.SeniorLiaisonCFL.com or Facebook at Senior Liaison.

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