What to pack for a loved one moving into respite care

Moving into a care home, even for a short stay, is a significant change. When the stay is for respite care, the aim is to give both the resident and their family a break, so comfort and familiarity matter a great deal. Packing the right items can make the transition smoother and help a loved one settle in more quickly. It is not just about practical necessities; small personal touches can lift their mood and make the room feel like their own.

Start with the essentials: documents and medication

The most important items to bring are the ones that keep your loved one safe and well cared for. The care home will need a record of their medical history, including any allergies, existing conditions, and a list of current medications. A copy of their doctor's contact details and their NHS number can also be useful. Medication should be clearly labelled in its original packaging, with dosage instructions written down. If they use a dosette box, bring it filled and labelled. It is wise to check with the home beforehand whether they manage medication themselves or whether the staff will administer it. That way you bring the right amount and avoid any confusion.

Clothing and footwear: comfort and practicality

Choose clothes that are easy to put on and take off, especially if your loved one has limited mobility. Think about items with elasticated waists, front fastenings, and soft fabrics that do not irritate the skin. Bring enough for a week, including underwear, socks, and nightwear. A dressing gown and slippers with non-slip soles are essential for trips to the bathroom or for sitting in communal areas. It is also worth packing a warm cardigan or jumper, even in summer, as care homes can sometimes feel cool. Label everything clearly with their name, either with a permanent marker or sew-on labels, to prevent clothes going missing in the laundry.



Footwear matters

Comfortable, supportive shoes are a must. They should be easy to slip on but secure enough not to fall off. Avoid laces if tying them is difficult; Velcro or elastic laces work well. Non-slip soles reduce the risk of falls, especially on smooth floors.

Personal care items: the things they already use

Familiar toiletries can make a big difference. Bring their usual shampoo, soap, toothpaste, and deodorant. If they have sensitive skin, the brand they know will avoid irritation. A toothbrush, hairbrush, and any denture care products should not be forgotten. For women, it is thoughtful to pack makeup or skincare products if they normally use them. For men, a razor and shaving cream, along with any aftershave they like, can help them feel more like themselves. Nail clippers, tweezers, and a small mirror are also handy. Remember to bring any continence products they rely on, such as pads or pull-ups, and let the staff know what they prefer.

Items for comfort and familiarity

A care home room can feel impersonal at first. Bringing a few things from home can transform it into a cosy, familiar space. A favourite blanket or cushion from their own sofa can provide comfort and a sense of security. Photographs of family, friends, or pets are lovely to have on a

bedside table or a small shelf. A clock with large numbers helps them keep track of time, and a radio or a small music player can provide entertainment and companionship. If they enjoy reading, bring a few books or magazines. A notepad and pen might also be useful for jotting down thoughts or keeping a diary of their stay.

Technology and entertainment

If your loved one uses a tablet or smartphone, bring it along with the charger. Download some of their favourite shows, music, or audiobooks beforehand. A pair of headphones can be helpful if they want to listen without disturbing others. For those who prefer simpler activities, a puzzle book, crossword, or deck of cards can pass the time. Check with the home about Wi-Fi access and whether they have a television in the room.



Special dietary needs and snacks

Respite care homes usually provide all meals, but it is still a good idea to bring some favourite snacks. This can be especially helpful if your loved one has a particular appetite or is a fussy eater. Think about easy-to-store items like biscuits, fruit, or savoury crackers. If they have specific dietary requirements, such as gluten-free or diabetic-friendly foods, bring a supply of suitable treats. Label any food containers clearly and let the staff know what you have brought.

It is also worth bringing a reusable water bottle or a favourite mug, as staying hydrated is important.

Important documents and contact information

Beyond medical records, there are a few other papers that can be useful. A copy of their emergency contact list, including family members and their GP, should be given to the care home. If they have a lasting power of attorney in place, a copy of that document may be needed. It is also sensible to bring a list of any regular appointments, such as chiropody or physiotherapy, so the staff can help them attend. Keep all these documents in a labelled folder and hand them over on the day of arrival.

What to leave at home

While it is tempting to bring everything, space is usually limited in a care home room. Leave behind large pieces of furniture, valuable jewellery, and large amounts of cash. These can be a security risk or simply get in the way. The Green Care Group, like many providers, will have a policy on personal belongings, so it is worth checking what they can accommodate. Similarly, avoid bringing items that might be a trip hazard, such as loose rugs or trailing cables.



A final word on settling in

The first few days in a new environment can be unsettling, even with the best preparation. Encourage your loved one to personalise their space with the items you have brought. Staff at the home will be experienced in helping new residents feel welcome, so do not hesitate to ask questions or express any concerns. A short stay in respite care is meant to be a positive experience for everyone involved. With a thoughtful packing list, you can help your loved one

feel more at ease and give yourself the peace of mind that they have everything they need. The Green Care Group and other care homes in the area will often have a list of suggested items, so it is always worth asking ahead of time.

The Green Care Group on social media Facebook