

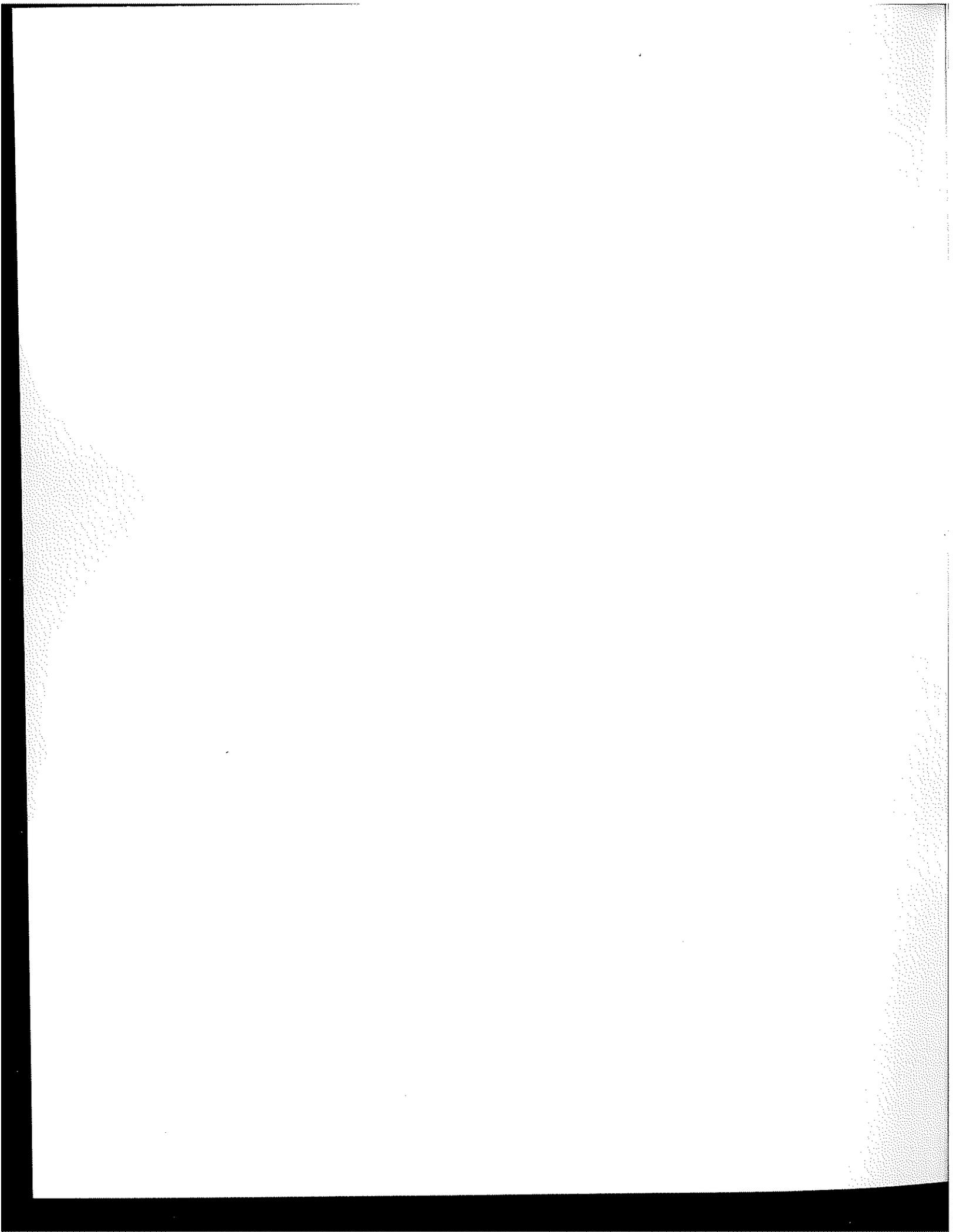
# Choosing a Nursing Home



A North Carolina  
Consumer Guide



What do  
quality  
measures  
mean?



## **What Do Government Quality-of-Care Measurements Mean for My Family and Me?**

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*The decision to place a loved one in a nursing home is difficult. Once you have made that decision, finding the right facility can be just as hard.*

*But how do you evaluate a nursing home? In the past, some organizations have offered checklists to help you. These checklists are meant to be taken with you to a facility as a guide to finding out about the residents' quality of life.*

*Now, the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is offering more information about the quality of care in nursing homes that accept Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries.*

*The comparison is based on 10 quality measures that can provide an indication of a nursing home's quality of care.*

*These measures distinguish between short-stay and long-term residents, and gauge the percentage of residents with a particular condition.*

*Short-stay residents typically are people who have been released from a hospital but need skilled nursing care for a while longer before they can go home.*

*Long-term residents typically are people who can no longer live alone because of chronic illness or disability and are expected to be in the nursing home for a long time or permanently.*

*The information CMS uses to calculate the percentages is gathered and reported by nursing home professionals during periodic assessments.*

*In order to offer a more accurate comparison of facilities, CMS makes certain adjustments in its calculations. For instance, when calculating the percentage of residents who need more help with daily tasks, CMS does not include residents in comas, residents with end-stage disease, or residents in hospice care. If these types of residents were counted in the measurements, nursing homes offering high quality end-of-life care would appear to score badly.*

*These quality measures are a tool that can help you choose a nursing home. But like all statistics, they can be difficult to interpret accurately. The explanations in this guide should help make your interpretation easier.*

*As you will see, high percentages can mean different things in different circumstances. Don't rush to judge the quality of care that any particular nursing home offers. Ask questions and make observations before you make a decision. These measures are only one tool to use in making your choice between facilities. Take them with you when you are trying to choose.*

*To learn more about checklists and other tools to help you, visit these Web sites: <http://www.ahca.org/info/index.html> and <http://www.nursinghomeaction.org>. You can also call 1-800-MEDICARE for more information. To see how nursing homes in your area compare on the measures, visit [www.medicare.gov/nhcompare/home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/nhcompare/home.asp).*

## **MEASURES FOR SHORT-STAY RESIDENTS**

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### **Percentage of Short-Stay Residents with Pain**

#### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who have experienced some pain every day or very bad pain at least once during a seven-day assessment period.

All short-stay residents are included in this measure.

#### **Why is the measure important?**

The goal with short-stay residents is recovery and discharge from the nursing home. If left untreated, pain can block recovery and cause further loss of a person's ability to function physically and mentally.

#### **What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

When considering this measure, keep in mind that residents can choose whether or not to take pain medication. Someone who chooses not to take pain medication may report consistent pain; however, this would not reflect on the nursing home's ability or willingness to manage pain in its residents.

A low percentage of short-stay residents with pain is good. If a nursing home has a high percentage on this measure, you should ask the administration about the facility's pain management practices.

### **Percentage of Short-Stay Residents with Delirium**

#### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who have shown signs of delirium (temporary severe confusion) at any time during a seven-day assessment period.

Delirium, not to be confused with senility or dementia, is a short-term state of confusion brought on by medication or illness. Like pain, it is not itself an illness, but is a symptom of an illness. Short-stay residents may enter the nursing home already showing signs of delirium.

Some common signs are:

- Difficulty paying attention
- Talking to people who aren't there
- Inability to speak coherently
- Restlessness
- Sluggishness
- Slipping in and out of coherence

Residents in comas, residents suffering from end-stage disease, and residents in hospice care are not included in this measure.

**Why is this measure important?**

Like pain, delirium is a sign that a person needs immediate medical attention. Because delirium is often brought on by medication or illness, it is a symptom of a larger problem. Perhaps a medication needs to be changed or the resident needs additional fluids. If left untreated, delirium can lead to more serious problems and can delay a short-stay resident's return home.

**What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

A high percentage could mean that a nursing home's staff does not adequately deal with symptoms of delirium in its residents.

If you are concerned about a high percentage on the delirium measure, you should consult the nursing home's administration, to find out whether they have established ways of handling and preventing delirium. Each nursing home should have a plan for helping residents who suffer from delirium.

**Percentage of Short-Stay Residents Whose Walking Improved**

**What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of short-stay residents who are walking as well or better in the second week of their stays than they were in the first week of their stays.

Residents in comas, residents suffering from end-stage disease, residents in hospice care, residents who are dependent on ventilators and residents who have lost the use of their legs are not included in this measure.

**Why is this measure important?**

It is crucial that nursing home staff work with short-stay residents to ensure they remain able to walk or improve in their ability to walk.

**What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

Unlike all the other measures, a high score on this measure is good.

If a nursing home scores low, you should ask questions about activities available to residents and how staff encourage short-stay residents to maintain or improve their walking.

## **MEASURES FOR LONG-TERM OR PERMANENT RESIDENTS**

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### **Percentage of Residents with Loss of Ability in Basic Daily Tasks**

#### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who unexpectedly need more help now than during the prior assessment period on any of these activities:

- Ability to move in bed
- Ability to move from one place to another (for example, from bed to a chair)
- Ability to feed themselves
- Ability to use the toilet

Residents in comas, residents suffering from end-stage disease, residents in hospice care and residents requiring total care on all four activities are not included in this measure.

#### **Why is this measure important?**

Losing the ability to do basic daily tasks can lead to other problems such as pressure (bed) sores, weight loss, diarrhea, incontinence, and a general loss of interest. Nursing home staff should work with residents to help them continue doing these activities on their own.

#### **What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

It may mean that the facility has a high percentage of residents whose ability to perform daily tasks was in decline *before* they came to the facility. In this case, a high score *may not* indicate a lack of sufficient care on the part of staff. Some residents' ability to do these activities will decline no matter what level of care the staff gives. However, it may also mean that the nursing home staff does not give enough attention to helping residents achieve and maintain the ability to do daily activities with less help.

If you are concerned about a high score on this measure you might consult with the nursing home administration about and the measures they take to help residents function on their own.

### **Percentage of Residents with Infections**

#### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who have any of the following:

- Pneumonia
- Respiratory infection
- Septicemia (a serious infection of the bloodstream, or blood poisoning)
- Urinary tract or bladder infection
- Viral hepatitis
- Wound infection
- Fever
- Recurrent lung aspiration (inhaled fluid)

Residents suffering from end-stage disease, newly admitted residents, and residents in hospice care are not included in this measure.

**Why is this measure important?**

Infections can make weak residents weaker and, if left untreated, can lead to hospitalization, decline in overall health, or death. Many infections can be prevented with immunizations. When infections do occur, they should be treated promptly.

**What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

On the one hand, it could mean that a high number of already weak residents have gotten infections. It is difficult to prevent or cure these infections no matter how attentive the staff is.

On the other hand, it could mean the nursing home is not giving proper attention to immunization and prevention. A high percentage of residents with infections is not ideal.

If you are concerned about a high infection rate at a nursing home, you should ask the administration about their immunization/prevention and treatment plans.

**Percentage of Long-Term Residents with Pain****What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of long-term residents who experienced some pain every day or very bad pain at least once during a seven-day assessment period.

All residents except those that are newly admitted are included in this measure, but residents' particular situations are taken into account when a nursing home's score is tallied.

**Why is this measure important?**

Persistent pain can undermine not only the healing process but also a person's general emotional well being. It can lead to depression and further health problems. While a resident may choose not to take pain medication, the staff should be doing everything possible to relieve pain.

**What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

It may mean the staff is doing a good job of discovering pain in residents. This should lead to appropriate pain control and a lower percentage on this measure in future evaluations in a nursing home with low resident turnover.

Another possibility is that some residents may refuse a large enough dose of pain medication because they want to remain alert. They would report some pain, but their choice to refuse pain medication would be reflected in the nursing home's score.

It could also mean that staff is not providing adequate pain control.

A high percentage of residents with pain is not ideal in any case. If a nursing home has a high percentage on this measure, even after taking into account the residents' particular situations, you should inquire further into the facility's pain management practices.

## **Percentage of Residents with Pressure (Bed) Sores**

### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who have pressure sores of any stage, from mild (minor skin reddening) to severe (deep wounds).

Bedsore generally occur when a person is sitting or lying in one position too long. Constant pressure will not allow blood to get to the skin and the skin begins to die.

Newly admitted residents are excluded from this measure.

### **Why is this measure important?**

It is important because it highlights a facility's prevention and treatment programs.

Pressure sores can almost always be prevented. If a resident enters a nursing home with pressure sores, proper treatment can result in healing, though the process is a long one.

### **What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

On the one hand, high percentage could mean a nursing home has a good reputation for giving high quality care to chronically ill people, thus it attracts residents who already have pressure sores. Pressure sores can take many months to heal completely; therefore, a nursing home that admits a high number of residents with pressure sores will score consistently high on this measure.

On the other hand, a high percentage of residents with pressure sores may mean that nursing home staff is not taking appropriate preventative measures.

If you are concerned about this measure, you should ask the facility's administration whether they have a treatment plan for residents with pressure sores and whether they have a prevention plan for residents at risk.

## **Percentage of Residents in Physical Restraints**

### **What does this measure tell me?**

The percentage of residents who were in physical restraints daily during a seven-day assessment period.

Included in the category of "physical restraint" are

- Certain types of walkers
- Chairs with lap trays
- Wrist restraints
- Reclining chairs
- Certain types of cushions
- Waist restraints

There is no distinction between restraints used inappropriately and restraints used temporarily to treat a medical condition. Newly admitted residents are excluded from this measure.

**Why is this measure important?**

Controversy surrounds this measure. Use of restraints for discipline or the convenience of staff does much more harm than good and is never acceptable. Residents should be free to move about. As well, inappropriate use of restraints can cause great damage including strangulation, pressure sores, loss of walking ability, and, in some cases, death.

However, some devices that enable greater mobility and self-sufficiency are labeled "restraints." These devices include some types of walkers and chairs with lap trays.

Keep in mind that medically necessary and medically supervised use of physical restraints is sometimes appropriate.

**What does a high percentage on this measure mean?**

Because this measure makes no distinction between inappropriate and appropriate use of restraints, a high percentage is a reason for you to consult the nursing home administration. Find out whether the facility has a policy for use of restraints and a plan for reducing their use. Ask to see the restraint devices and observe how, why, and when they are used.

*This information is also available on the Web at <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/ltc>. To see how nursing homes in your area compare on the measures, visit [www.medicare.gov/nhcompare/home.asp](http://www.medicare.gov/nhcompare/home.asp).*

**THIS GUIDE IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY**

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