

The Next Chapter



“I’m afraid I’ll lose my independence and control over my own life.”

Maintaining your independence: Living in a senior community can actually help promote your independence, expand your choices, and offer you more control over your own life.

We humans are pretty independent creatures by nature.

Very early on, children begin asserting their “right” to be in control of their own destinies. The so-called “terrible twos” is simply a 2-year-old’s way of declaring his or her independence: “I know what I want, and I am in charge here!”

As a group, we are inherently social beings, but as individuals, we are encouraged from birth to be self-reliant, to make our own decisions, follow our own paths, and not to be dependent on others for help.

By the time we are 55, “independence” is a large part of our identity. We’ve had successful careers, perhaps raised a family, maintained our own homes, and we can proudly say, “I did it my way.”

So it makes sense that the idea of losing our independence would be a natural concern. It concerned us when we were 2, and it still concerns us as we transition into the next chapter of our lives.

What does a loss of independence and personal freedom look like to you?

Psychologists tell us it’s good to name our fears. Once we’ve spread them out on the table, we can then discuss solutions and ways to avoid having our fears become reality.

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Here are a few common worries experienced by many seniors who value being in control of their own lives. Which, if any, concern you?

I worry about ...

- being unable to maintain my own home and property;
- being unable to care for myself or my partner/spouse;
- being unable to move about freely;
- becoming isolated from friends, family, and the greater community;
- being unable to choose my own friends, neighbors, and activities;
- no longer having ready access to the things I enjoy;
- being unable to make my own choices and having others make them for me;
- becoming a burden to my partner/spouse or children.

In general, you may worry about not being able to live an enriched, meaningful life ... on your own terms.

People who are considering moving into a retirement community may voice similar concerns, such as the fear of losing their freedom to come and go, losing their autonomy, or losing the right to make their own decisions. Others fear they will lose their personal privacy or be forced to participate in activities that don't interest them.

The fact is, a sudden change in health could endanger your independence right in your own home, whereas, a reputable, quality retirement community already has taken steps to address these and other issues related to independent, active aging.

A new way of looking at personal freedom.

Ironically, some of the same activities that have traditionally been a sign of our independent nature—such as maintaining our own home—can also act as barriers to our independence. These activities actually can tie us down and reduce our personal freedom and lifestyle choices. Consider for a moment ...

- What if you no longer had to shovel snow, clean the bathrooms, or fix that leaky faucet? Might that free up your days to spend in ways you find more enriching and fulfilling, such as spending more time with friends and family, writing your memoirs, or joining a walking group?
- What if you knew your lawn always would be mowed, plants watered, and house secured? Might that allow you to take more spontaneous trips?
- What if you could enjoy tasty meals without having to spend time shopping, chopping, and doing dishes? Even if you enjoy cooking, wouldn't it be nice to have the freedom to take the day off?

Rather than restricting personal choice and independence, senior communities can be life-expanding, opening doors you may not have realized even existed.

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How a retirement community honors and helps promote your personal freedom.

Retirement communities are unique senior-living options designed to promote each individual's highest level of independence. In fact, it is their mandate to offer home and lifestyle options that encourage greater well-being and a more fulfilling life.

Here are a few community services that help promote personal autonomy, choice, and independence:

- **Home and yard maintenance** offers freedom from time-consuming chores;
- **Single-family cottages and apartment homes** offer autonomy, privacy;
- **Health care services** (including in-home) offer freedom to age in place;
- **Housekeeping and laundry services** increase personal independence;
- **Dining service** offers the freedom to enjoy delicious, nutritious meals without having to prepare them;
- **Transportation services** offer freedom to come and go more freely;
- **24-hour front-desk staffing and other measures** provide a secure environment and offer freedom from worries about security;
- **Robust programs that promote your mental, physical, and spiritual health** help create wellness—and the healthier you are, the more independence you have, giving you greater control over your life choices.

A community that truly has your well-being as its mission will listen to residents and respond accordingly. You will tell them what you want (not the other way around), and they will provide the support to help turn your dreams into reality.

Being proactive and planning ahead can help keep you independent longer.

How can we maintain—even increase—our independence and control over things that directly affect our lives? The same way we always have: by planning ahead.

For instance, if we are about to be laid off at work, we put ourselves on a budget and begin looking for another job. If we're about to have a child, we fix up the nursery, buy a stroller, and stock a large supply of diapers.

Likewise, if we do not want to run the risk of having someone else decide where and how we will live, it's best to start planning when we still have our health and plenty of time to do our own research and make our own choices.

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Those who think about the future now and move ahead on planning for it are able to deal better with sudden changes that can threaten security and independence.

Continue your dreams, don't retire them.

This is the time in your life that you are free to do more of the things you've always dreamed of doing. To explore new places, strike up new friendships, relax, stay active, worry less. To take on a new vocation or volunteer more. And to cut out a few of those things that you never really liked doing.

Being proactive—as you have been all your life—is the best way to remain in charge of your own destiny and well-being.

No one can guarantee that you'll always be totally self-reliant. But studies have shown that you can significantly extend your self-reliance by planning ahead and finding a comfortable lifestyle within a supportive “active aging” community—one that honors who you are today and who you aspire to be tomorrow.

For many, it is not enough just to be independent. Once you understand your options, you gain the personal power to ask, “What will I do with my newfound freedom?” That is the truly exciting question.

Our Mission: To enrich people's lives.
