

# 5 Secrets to Happiness in Retirement

## Retirement gives you more control over how you spend your time.

Many people become happier as they age.

According to psychologists, every individual has his or her own set point of happiness. If something good happens, or something bad, a person will temporarily become more or less happy. But then with time, as the person adapts to a new situation, the individual will revert to approximately the same basic level of happiness. The good news is that most people report that they are happier than average. The even better news is that, in general, people get happier as they grow older.

It's called the happiness U curve. Studies have shown that, as children, we start out pretty happy. But most people slide down the happiness curve as they grow up and face life's difficulties. But eventually people either learn how to cope with stress, or they experience less stress, and they begin to feel less anger and sadness. Then sometime around age 50 people start getting happier again. They reach a happiness peak in their 60s, which declines only slightly at the very end of life.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, there's an additional happiness bonus that comes with retirement. In a poll, almost 70 percent of retirees reported that retirement has given them a chance to have new, more fulfilling experiences, and 80 percent said that retirement brought them more occasions to enjoy themselves.

Here are five secrets for increasing your odds of experiencing enjoyment – and happiness – during the years of your retirement:

**1. Scope out your financial picture.** This doesn't mean, as many experts say, you need to replace 80 percent of your pre-retirement income, or that you have to be sitting on a \$1 million nest egg. Yes, people need this kind of money if they want to remain in their big house in an expensive suburb or travel the world to all the fashionable destinations, which is fine, if that's your ambition. But many retirees get along just as well on less than half their pre-retirement income. The key is to strike your own balance between maintaining a certain lifestyle and following a simpler, more relaxed, but perhaps no less creative path.

**2. Retirement can improve your health.** A paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that retirement often produces a positive impact on people's well-being, and that the overall health benefits exhibit long lasting effects. The benefits are not attributed to increased health care utilization. Instead, they are largely a result of fewer demands on our time, more control over our lives, less pressure, less stress and a less-hecktic lifestyle.

**3. You need to stay busy.** The happiest retirees are not those who lie around in a hammock in the backyard. One survey found that the more active retirees are, the happier they are. Over three quarters of retirees who engaged in ten or more activities reported being "very satisfied" with

retirement, compared with only half of those who engaged in fewer than five activities. Some of the happiest people are those who phased into retirement by transitioning to a part-time job, or working fewer hours at their old job. Others have started encore careers or done volunteer work. The point is, happy people tend to be engaged in some sort of meaningful activity that keeps their minds sharp and offers them plenty of positive social interactions.

**4. Stay close to family and friends.** Loneliness is a potential pitfall of retirement, so it's important to nurture your old friendships and develop new ones, especially if you are relocating to another area of the country. Similarly, find ways to remain friends with your children and grandchildren, even though they may seem totally focused in their own lives. Whether they realize it or not, they can benefit enormously from your contribution to their activities. And whether you realize it or not, you need them for support and engagement. As Paul Bloom, a Yale University psychologist says, the key to happiness is to seek out substantial goals "like friends and family and long term projects."

**5. Get some plastic surgery.** This may sound like a joke, but Bloom also points out that while our level of happiness is not particularly sensitive to what happens in our environment, there are some exceptions. One is noise. We don't adapt to noise. Constant exposure to excessive noise can make us miserable. The other side of the coin is cosmetic surgery. Surveys have shown that cosmetic surgery not only makes people happier, but they remain happier for a long time. Nothing, it seems, makes us feel better than looking our best.

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