

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Planning for Your Retirement: Things to Consider

When we think about retiring, most of us imagine a time when we won't have to rush off to work, we'll enjoy leisure activities and have time simply to relax. We may worry about how we'll manage financially once we leave our full-time jobs. But few of us have made solid plans for our retirement that include looking at our finances, personal relationships and meaningful activities.

Financial Planning

Begin by making a list of current expenses (housing, food, transportation, utilities, medical expenses, etc.) so you'll know how much funds will be required. Then, estimate your retirement income (company pension, investments, etc.) Be sure to get help from your accountant or a financial planner to determine what your income and expenses will look like after retirement.

Lifestyle Decisions

Many individuals or couples decide to sell their homes and scale down by moving to a condominium, cottage, mobile home, etc. The decision to move may be for financial reasons, to re-locate to a warmer climate or simply to scale back on homeowners' responsibilities. However, it’s important to remember that this is a big lifestyle change. It will also coincide with the emotional transition from work to retirement. This can be an overwhelming amount of change in a short time period.

Before you and your partner make decisions on retirement location, be sure to consider "what you will do" and "with whom." After all, if you move to a remote area, you will be isolated from many of the social functions and volunteer options available in urban areas. You may also miss friends from the old neighborhood.

Here are some of the options to consider when deciding where to live during retirement:

- **Staying in your home.** Consider finding help with household tasks (grass cutting, window cleaning, gardening, etc.)
- **Apartments/condominiums.** Smaller living space means less effort and no need to worry about building maintenance or upkeep.
- **Retirement communities.** Apartments or small homes, offering social and recreational activities and sometimes meals and housekeeping services.
- **Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRC).** Facilities that offer both independent and assisted living apartments.

Adjusting to Retired Life

If you have worked full time all of your adult life, the transition from work to retirement can be difficult. One day you are at work among your colleagues, with a set of specific responsibilities. The next, you are unemployed, with no schedule to keep, no specific tasks to perform and much less social interaction. This sudden shift can make anyone feel like a fish out of water.

The first stage of retirement, sometimes referred to as "the honeymoon stage," is like a long holiday. There are trips to take, moves to make or households to re-locate. But once this phase is over, many retired people become bored, lonely and even depressed. They see the next 15 to 20 years looming in

front of them, with no life task or passion to keep them focused or bring them joy.

Finding Your Passion

Once the honeymoon period is over, what will you do to keep active and bring joy into your life? Here are some ideas to get you started:

Consider volunteering. Studies have proven that staying active through volunteering can help keep you healthy. Volunteer options include:

- Helping in local schools (mentoring, assisting)
- Becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister
- Providing transportation—driving for community care; meals on wheels, etc.
- Volunteering in your local hospital
- Joining a charity, a service club (Rotary, Kiwanis, etc.), or a religious group

Go back to school or learn new skills. Now is a time when you can re-invent yourself. Why not take some lessons—learn to play the piano or guitar. Learn a new language. Consider woodworking, pottery or weaving. Go back to college or university—most campuses offer special rates for elders.

Work part time. A part-time job provides extra income, a chance to keep your body and mind active, and an opportunity to socialize. You could look for part-time or consulting work in your chosen field, or try something new. Why not work at something you enjoy, such as in a garden centre, computer store, hobby shop, golf course, etc.

Fitness

Fitness is an important part of staying healthy and active as we age. Regular fitness (at least 30 minutes, three to five times per week) helps keep you active, and offers the following health benefits:

- Reduces the risk of heart disease, colon cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis
- Relieves pain and eases joint mobility in osteoarthritis
- Reduces depression, stress, anxiety, blood pressure and cholesterol levels

Be sure to consult with your doctor before commencing any new fitness routine.

Nutrition

We need to find the appropriate fuel to keep our aging bodies in their optimum condition so we can enjoy the retirement years. Here are some nutrition tips:

- **Calorie intake.** As we age, we need fewer calories. This means focusing on smaller portions, leaner cuts of meat, more fish, low-fat dairy products and plenty of fruits, vegetables and grains.
- **Vitamins and minerals.** To ward off osteoporosis (bone loss), calcium intake should be increased for those over the age of 50. Try having at least 1,200 milligrams of calcium each day, either through dairy products and/or through calcium supplements.
- **Fiber.** Increasing your fiber intake is important to avoid constipation and other digestive problems, lower cholesterol and manage weight.
- **Salt.** Decrease salt intake and substitute other herbs and spices.

Relationships

Retirement changes the dynamic of any marriage or partnership. Not only will you be spending a lot more time together, but your changing status—from worker to retired person—can change the nature of your relationship with your partner.

It’s important for couples to discuss their expectations for the retirement years and agree on goals, as
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well as both separate and joint activities that they can enjoy. Try to find ways of keeping your own identity and interests, while also doing some things together. Be patient and keep the lines of communication open as you enter this new life phase together.

Many people realize they have focussed so much of their time on their careers, that they haven't developed close friendships outside the workplace and they become lonely. To meet friends, consider:

- Developing or rekindling friendships that have lapsed before you retire
- Joining a community club or group (bridge club, golf club, gardening club, etc.)

When retirement time rolls around, many issues need to be considered before you take this step. Be sure to discuss your decisions with your family so that they can offer their continued encouragement and support throughout your retirement.