

# How to Plan a Happier Retirement

Make key changes, clarify a ‘purpose,’ and have some fun, too.

*Created in Collaboration with Kiplinger.*

Most people have a personal vision for the best ways to enjoy living in retirement. Some can’t wait to do something different, such as starting a small business. Others hope to make a difference by volunteering. And some see it as a time to spend more time on hobbies and activities such as travel and dining out. But almost everyone prioritizes one simple objective: happiness.

Fortunately, American retirees are largely reaching that goal: 80% of them say they are enjoying themselves, according to an analysis by the National Bureau of Economic Research.<sup>1</sup> So, how do they reach that state of satisfaction?

It doesn’t happen by accident, evidence suggests. A truly satisfying and fulfilling retirement goes beyond financial planning to include considerations about how you’ll spend your time. Yet when a recent poll asked whether people had thought about how they’d occupy their time in retirement, less than half of pre-retirees (44%) and only about half of recent retirees (54%) said they had.<sup>2</sup>

To get started, ask yourself these four questions.

## Set New Lifestyle Goals

*Ask: What changes, subtle or large, will enhance my life?*

An Australian study<sup>3</sup> recently showed that retirement can provide opportunities to leave behind unhealthy routines and create new patterns. These changes can often lead to healthier lifestyles, including increased activity levels and better sleep habits.

For Chuck and Nancy Fahrni, retirement meant a chance to shed stress. Chuck, now 65, worked as a power lineman for a public utility in Oregon’s coastal Tillamook County. Nancy, 61, worked as a registered nurse. Both were often pulled to work at odd hours in response to emergencies. Stress was part of the routine.

So, they carefully planned a retirement life that would deliver the exact opposite, moving to a few isolated Montana acres where relaxation, peace, and quiet abound.

“As far as hopes, dreams, desires in retirement,” Chuck says, “this place has given Nancy and me all our wishes.”

## Embrace New Interests and Activities

*Ask: What activities or interests might newfound time and flexibility usher in?*

With a potentially more flexible schedule, retirees can test drive new interests or focus with renewed zeal on pursuits that may have been sidelined during working years. Many create a wish list that anticipates time for both.

Nancy’s list was short and simple: photography, hiking, cooking, and baking.

“I didn’t get a chance to do that during my work life,” she says. “I was on call so much. Now it’s a gift to me.”

Chuck jokes that he had just one item on his wish list: “to get out of the rain.” The move to Hamilton, Montana, checked that box and several others.

“My passion has always been outdoor activities: fishing, hunting, tying flies, and trying them out in the creek right down the road,” he says. “It was a good move, coming here.”

The couple also discovered a new interest in travel, near and far, that they plan to keep indulging with trips both in the U.S. and overseas.

## **Don't Wait to Pursue Passions**

*Ask: What do I love doing now, and how might that change if my health changes, too?*

With just 29% of working Americans expecting to retire before they turn 65,<sup>4</sup> retirees' changing health can influence what they do and how much they enjoy it. That's something the Fahrnis factored into their retirement plans, including spending as much time as possible in the great outdoors, for as long as they are able.

“We retired here so we could pursue the passions, like hiking, that keep us young and healthy,” Nancy says. “It's what we need.”

So far, their plan is working, despite some health concerns – including a hip replacement – that have dogged Chuck. Fortunately, he has recovered well, and wasn't slowed down for long. “As long as we're healthy, we're going to enjoy it,” Chuck says.

## **Act Now to Make It Happen**

*Ask: Do these choices make sense and are they realistic?*

Just as you regularly review your financial portfolio, do the same with your plans to help achieve fulfillment during retirement through a well-considered mix of personal goals.

“Make sure that you have a plan,” Nancy says. “It's best to know where you're going and not just say, ‘Oh wow, I'm 65; what am I going to do now?’”

Once you have a sense of what you'd like retirement to look like, talk to your financial professional. Together, you can create a financial roadmap to help move closer toward your vision.

Kiplinger has an in-house content studio, which reports on investing, retirement planning and wise money management for its partner organizations, providing trustworthy advice and guidance for their readers.

<sup>1</sup> “5 Secrets to Happiness in Retirement,” U.S. News & World Report, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Retirement Confidence Survey, Employee Benefit Research Institute, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> “Retirement Can Lead to Positive Lifestyle Changes,” National Seniors, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> “Most U.S. Employed Adults Plan to Work Past Retirement Age,” Gallup, 2017.