



How to Help Parents—and Yourself—Live Better at 80, 90 and Beyond

They say as we get older, we get wiser, but let's face it - many new uncertainties and challenges crop up as people get deeper into their golden years. Changes in physical health and issues with memory can mean you—or your elderly parents—might require new types of never-before-needed assistance.

Two key issues may impact your life or the lives of your elderly parents - choosing where to live out those last decades and safeguarding wealth from costly cognitive mistakes.

More than 75% of Americans age 50 and older believe there's no place like home. They want to stay in their current residences and communities as they age instead of moving to a nursing home or other option (AARP). But wishing doesn't make it so. To potentially make that happen for you and your spouse or your parents (or all of the above), you need to plan with the same level of intentionality that you plan for your financial future.

According to Kim Evanoski, CEO of care management company Care Manage for All, all of us need to carefully consider the following:

1. **Needs.** If you're advising your parents, talk with their doctors about predicted ways health problems could reduce mobility or the ability to be self-sufficient. If you're planning for yourself, research your family health history and how specific illnesses may impact independence.
2. **Renovations to the home.** Often, choosing to remain at home requires adjustments to the house or condo to make it safe, accessible and comfortable for any age. Consider the following examples:
 - Swap out existing hardware such as doorknobs with levers.
 - Add sturdier handrails along stairs.
 - Install rollout shelves in the kitchen.
 - Widen doorways to at least 32 inches which will allow better access for people using walkers and wheelchairs.
 - Move the main bedroom to the first floor.
3. **Social connections.** Stay engaged and reach out to friends, family, and neighbors. Depression and other health issues are associated with loneliness and isolation can be serious problems. Ask yourself how aging at home might impact social connections—yours and/or those of your parents.
4. **Driving.** Hire a driver to take you to visit see loved ones, run errands, see the doctor, and go to shows and movies. If your gross motor functions are slowing, it is far better to be safe on the road than to take the risk of harming yourself or another.

Safeguarding Financial Wellbeing

As we age, we may find that the biggest risk to our financial health isn't a market crash—it's our own behavior (Chris Heye, co-founder of Whealthcare Planning). Our cognitive abilities tend to decline over time, and the risk of dementia rises as we get older. According to the World Health Organization, the number of people living with dementia worldwide is expected to nearly triple by 2050.**

However, you don't need a diagnosed illness to make harmful financial decisions. Various health issues can diminish people's ability to make prudent choices, leading to detrimental outcomes. Beware of the following unwise decisions:

- Investing impulsively. Aging can reduce our ability to accurately assess risk and control our impulses. That, in turn, can lead people to buy investments that are far too volatile for their risk tolerance based on their needs and their age.
- Falling for financial scams and exploitation. Behavioral factors such as loneliness can make people—even highly intelligent and financially savvy people—susceptible to

financial scams. Such cons may involve investment “opportunities” that don’t exist or thieves who feign romantic interest in widowed or divorced seniors.

So how can you help the aging to avoid these scenarios? And just as important, what can you do to prepare yourself, so you avoid making major financial mistakes as you age?

1. **Plan now.** If you’re in your 40s’, 50’s or 60’s, make a plan for how and when you want to transfer decision-making powers to heirs or others. Make the plan dependent on your level of cognitive health—using tests that assess your decision-making ability. If you’re concerned about your elderly parents, help them take such tests.

2. **Get documents in order.** Formalize your wishes and plans via a will, a living will, power of attorney and other legal documents. You can also create documents that spell out certain guidelines—such as family agreements that explain how and to whom you will lend money.

3. **Communicate with financial advisor(s).** Get to know your parents’ financial advisor(s), so you can set the stage for dealing with potentially difficult conversations and challenging situations. You may end up coordinating efforts down the road, so build relationships with these key professionals now.

4. **Watch for warning signs.** If a parent or spouse is acting impulsively with money or in other ways, that’s a possible sign of deteriorating health.

5. **Guard against loneliness which can also put older adults at risk.** If an older family member reports having conversations with “new” people whom nobody knows, investigate the nature of these discussions. It could indicate that exploiters are making inroads into the family member’s life.

6. **Take action.** If you suspect that something is amiss, address it, consult with advisors, and seek the help of professionals. It’s much better to plan and take helpful steps early—before there are issues or emergencies that force you to react instead of being proactive. This is true whether you’re helping your parents or thinking about your own lifestyle during your golden years.

Best bet: Discuss these and similar concerns with the key trusted professionals in your life.

Resources:

*Joanne Binette and Kerri Vasold, 2018 Home and Community Preferences: A National Survey of Adults Age 80-Plus, AARP Research, August 2018.

**World Health Organization, *10 Facts on Dementia*, September 2019.

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