



Five Things That Actually Get Better with Age

Planning financially for retirement can help make aging more comfortable

Yes, there are good things about being old, such as increased happiness, less stress, better marriages and deeper friendships. You seldom hear that. People tend to focus on the negatives of aging.

How old is “old?” I don't know exactly, but after my recent birthday I can say that it's much older than 58. My 12-year-old son told me, “Mom, I've always thought of people who are over 60 as being really old. I don't think of you as really old, so guess I will need to redefine what is old.”

Still, I am old enough to know from personal experience that the body begins to slow down and fall apart as we age. I also know from working with clients that aging can be expensive.

One of the biggest threats to a retirement nest egg, besides the possibility of outliving it, is the high cost of care for increasing health needs.

Things Get Better With Age

An article in Consumer Reports on Health found there are some things that actually get better with age:

1. You get wiser. This one seems intuitively obvious to me, but as I once heard a researcher say, “If you can't measure something, it doesn't exist.” Research conducted by the Universities of Texas and Michigan found that significantly more older people ranked in the top 20% in wisdom performance and the group with an average age of 65 consistently outperformed younger participants.

Maybe there's some truth to the joke about parents seeming to get smarter as their kids get older.

2. You have fewer difficult emotions. A Gallup survey found that people in their 70s and 80s reported less stress, worry and anger than younger respondents. I found it curious that stress peaks at age 25 and steadily declines, dropping rapidly from 60 to 73. I guess that leaves me something to look forward to in a couple of years.

3. You become happier. This was a surprise, especially given my projection that increasing aches and pains probably increase unhappiness. Again, the devil is in the definition of happiness. I suggest that we often equate happiness with well-being, which can be broken into three segments: physical, emotional, and financial.

A study by Stanford and Tufts University professors said that aging is actually associated with increased emotional well-being. The article didn't mention physical and financial well-being. Based on my experience, I expect that physical well-being decreases with age and financial well-being is dependent upon a complex host of variables.

4. Your marriage gets better. The Journal of Social and Personal Relationships found that older couples experience greater satisfaction and positive experiences with each other. The report also says happily married older people have better health, quality of life and relationships with their children and friends.

I think that is another one of those intuitively obvious facts that researchers still feel they must validate.



5. Your relationships get deeper and richer. While younger people have more friends, the quality of older people's relationships becomes richer. A study done by Case Western Reserve University found that volunteering was the most consistent predictor of cognitive well-being in people over age 72.

Plan Financially

Even with all these positives, old age isn't exactly something to look forward to. Yet it doesn't mean our golden years will necessarily be overridden with tarnish and rust.

Living a healthy lifestyle and planning financially for retirement can certainly help make aging more comfortable. And clearly, aging is better than the alternative of not being around to grow old.

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