

How does retirement affect marriage?

After [money](#), the single most common worry about retirement is how it will affect your marriage. Let's be honest, if one or both of you have had full-time careers, suddenly having so much time on your hands can be an adjustment. You may have heard of Retired Husband Syndrome, but chances are this new phase of life will be difficult for you too. Perhaps you miss a job you loved or you're trying to get used to having someone else around the house all day. So, how do you address these issues and what are the solutions? Ahead of Valentine's Day, we answer your questions.

Retirement and marriage

Even in the best of circumstances, retirement can challenge your marriage in ways you didn't expect. Whether one of you is still working or you have both stopped, retirement turns daily routines, tasks and everyday intimacy upside down.

According to gransnetters [the key to a successful marriage](#) after retirement depends on:

- Maintaining your own life - keep up with your individual activities and add some shared ones
- An agreed and fair understanding of housework
- Being kind to one another
- Communicating when things go wrong

Gransnetters say:

"Retirement is like most things - providing you have good health, it is what you make of it."

"We don't feel that we want to complain because, comparatively, we are so lucky. Nonetheless, we need to have a greater awareness of how to overcome what might be common problems."

"The problems come when one or both partners has the oh-god-nothing-to-do syndrome. You spend your time wishing life was more interesting and thinking that it is the fault of the other half that you

are bored and frustrated. Find something interesting to do or steer your other half toward an interest if they are out of practice with finding one for themselves. And talk to one another."

Will I go mad if we spend all day, every day together?

One of the most common pre-retirement concerns is about personal space - or, rather, a lack of personal space after retirement. Will the dynamic of the relationship change when you're together all the time? Will you become irritated with your partner's habits? And can you prepare for this transformative phase of your marriage?

Gransnetters say:

"My husband drove me mad when he first retired - until I got him [an allotment](#). We now meet for lunch, then go our own ways most of the day, meeting for dinner and spending the evenings together."

"I retired nearly three years ago and found it difficult to adjust. I think I, too, was very difficult to live with at first - maybe I still am. You lose your identity to some extent and have to reinvent yourself. We have adjusted to each other now - it is certainly better than it was in the beginning. It is just another phase in life and you have to find your way, just like when you first started living together."

"I often wish my husband was still working as I rarely have the house to myself these days. There are times when I could have a really good cupboard turnout, do my sewing or spread things around without someone needing to get to where I am. The simple things I used to like doing when I knew nobody was going to interrupt me for a few hours..."

Can I go on a course to 'learn' how to retire well?

Is it possible to learn how to retire well? Actually, it might be. Many employers offer and encourage pre-retirement courses and seminars where you can ask questions and get guidance on what to expect from retirement. These courses focus on, but are not necessarily limited to, areas such as personal relationships, [losing your social circle](#) and how to maintain a sense of usefulness and achievement outside of paid work.

Gransnetters say:

"Before retiring, I attended a retirement seminar with a friend. The person conducting the seminar said that being with your partner 24/7 is one of the most difficult things you will have to contend with in retirement. I therefore think it is vital to have your own space, which is sometimes difficult, I know."

So I do it by walking the dog two to three hours alone each day. I also go out with friends for lunch a few times a month. My husband turns wood and spends quite some time in his shed - alone."

"Pre-retirement courses do still happen - my husband and I both went on (different) ones tailored to our different jobs. We both found them very helpful. There was financial as well as lifestyle advice, with an emphasis on thinking positively about retirement as another very enjoyable phase of your life. It seems to have worked for us - we have no regrets at all about giving up work."

Will I miss the work/life balance?

Spending such a large chunk of our lives **at work** does affect our personality and when we retire, we're leaving behind a part of ourselves. Whether or not that part will be missed could depend on several factors, such as how much you've enjoyed your job, how well prepared for retirement you are and whether you have a good support system in place. If you are worried about how you'll feel without your job, [start planning your retirement early](#) so that you know what you will be doing for the first few months.

Gransnetters say:

"I think this is a time in our lives when we reflect. It can be scary wondering if the best is behind us and perhaps regretting some of our decisions and worrying about the future. I sometimes feel trapped as opportunities arise less and less. Not just in my marriage, but my work. It's a horrible, confusing set of emotions."

"I'm terrified of losing my identity. What will I do all day? Will I enjoy the novelty of lazy mornings or will it wear off? Will my husband and I have anything to say to each other all day? So much of my life my work defined me and I'm concerned I'll feel lost without it."

"This time of your life is a full of huge adjustments for you. Your role has changed already and will continue to change."

Adjusting to retirement together

How long does it take to feel 'settled' into retirement?

It's likely down to how prepared you are, and it's not uncommon in couples that one person struggles to a greater extent with the adjustment process than the other. The adjustment process is about finding the right balance between hobbies, travels, **voluntary work**, grandchild care arrangements,

social meet-ups, time with your partner and anything else you enjoy - and it often takes time to figure out what works for you both.

Gransnetters say:

"It took us several years into retirement before we achieved a working compromise on activities and time. One of the best things we did was to utilise our spare bedrooms as a 'study' so we have a space to retreat to and to keep our things in without being interrupted."

"Yes, it does take time to adjust to a different way of coexisting. My husband I are lucky in that, whilst having retired from full-time employment, we are still doing freelance work, so are gradually getting used to seeing each other more often."

"My husband and I retired at the same time. That first year all we did was bicker. But somehow I started taking classes and he began to have hobbies. We went our separate ways except for a few days a week where we would go to the gym together or do something fun. Now, 10 years later, we have our pattern."

Does volunteering help?

One of the best ways to bridge the adjustment process from paid employment to retirement is through **voluntary work**. Whether you do it together or separately, it not only helps you to get out of the house and maintain regular activities, but it is a great way to ensure that you have something to talk about at the end of the day.

Gransnetters say:

"After retiring we moved to a new area and decided to do some voluntary work. We both 'work' at the local community centre on different mornings/afternoons. This gives us the routine we were used to having when we were working. It also gives us a social life without too much cost. So many of our volunteers have health problems but love feeling useful."

"My hubby took an interest in restoring small pieces of furniture to be sold at our local charity shop where I work as a volunteer two days a week. It gives us something to chat about as we both have a similar interest by way of the charity and the friends we have made there over the years."

"My husband was dreading retirement. He eventually got a part-time job as a volunteer tour guide for the National Trust and he loves it. He can choose his days/hours and he's out meeting people and is back 'into life'."

My retirement is not how I had imagined it

Is your retirement not living up to your expectations? Can you put words on why? Try explaining your disappointment to your partner or a close friend to figure out how to address it. It may be that you need to structure your retirement or that you and your partner want different things. Whichever, it won't go away until you figure out what's missing in your life.

Gransnetters say:

*"My husband and I retired seven years ago. We both built up lots of hobbies and interests and were enjoying our retirement, even though money was a bit of a struggle at times. My husband in his wisdom then decided to take a part-time job, at least it started that way, but now he works virtually full-time and **I find myself spending our retirement alone**. Our relationship is suffering and now we seem like two strangers in the same house instead of a married couple. I am unable to work through ill health or I would go back to work myself. I've tried to tell him how I feel, but he just shuts off to it. He cannot see what he is losing in front of his face."*

"It's very hard to realise and accept that you may have another 20 years together both wanting completely different things. I think a lot of talking and some compromise may be needed, otherwise you are together just for convenience and a roof over your heads, like a houseshare rather than a partnership with shared interests."

"I'm retired. My husband is on the edge of retirement - he can take his state pension this summer. He has a private pension too, but he keeps on working and I can't see him stopping. He has a small consultancy with a friend and although we have talked about him giving up, he clearly isn't ready to yet. That makes me a bit sad. I would have liked us to retire together and do things such as travelling."

My husband and I want different things in retirement

It sometimes happens that a couple retires together and suddenly find themselves with partners they hardly know. So much time is taken up with work that when we retire, we *really* get to see all sides of our spouse, if we hadn't before. Wanting different things is fine as long as you still want each other and are willing to compromise. Whatever it is you disagree on, give as much as you take of your partner's goodwill and encourage them to do the same.

We have little or nothing in common

Suddenly feeling that your compatibility or lack thereof is magnified after retirement is, sadly, normal. It is also normal to find that you have almost nothing in common apart from each other. But, unlike compatibility, that is not necessarily a problem. Now that you and your partner are retired, you have time to explore your own hobbies and interests separately - and then meet up afterwards to enjoy each other's company. If you do not feel as keen to spend time with friends for example, make sure that doesn't limit your partner's availability to be sociable. Likewise, if your partner has no hobbies but you have plenty, make an effort to spend time with your partner, but do set aside the time you need for your own hobbies.

Gransnetters say:

"He makes a fuss about getting together with friends and family as well as making it awkward for me to invite anyone into the house. I am quite a 'busy person' and enjoy the family and grandkids, meeting friends, craft work and have recently joined U3A and hope to be joining the local choir. Although we have always been different, it seems that now we don't have such a structured life, the difference is exaggerated."

"I have tried chivvying him up and trying to get him to do things until I started to ask myself why I was doing it. He has the right to be himself and live his life as he wishes, as long as he isn't harming anyone. He is honest and faithful and I do not think it is up to me to try and make him someone else. He affords me the same courtesy, and although I know that sometimes he wishes I were there and not out, he never interferes or tries to stop me."

"Unfortunately retirement is the time when diverging interests and less compatibility show up. While busy working, these factors are less relevant and can be borne. My husband and I are in our mid-60s now, and I am aware of 'time running out'. I am caught between the desire to be unselfish, supportive, and a good companion, and also to go off and do my own thing. It strikes me as a pity that in any marriage the compromises mean that the individuals' lives are curtailed. I do stress to my husband that he must go for it if there is something he really wants to do or places he'd like to go."

"My husband hated being retired and went back to work full-time at first and now part-time. At 78 he is still not retired. If we go our own way in the day it gives us lots to talk about when we get together."

Your husband must be allowed to do as he wants. You cannot change him so perhaps you could change how you feel about it?"

"The most important aim in retirement is to be content. Just be what you want to be and don't be too disappointed if your other half has other ideas. It's his retirement as well."

Should we try counselling?

If your disparity is so great that your relationship is breaking down after retirement, perhaps counselling could be an option. After all, you did make the relationship work while you were working, so this could be more about finding your footing in retirement than your compatibility.

Gransnetters say:

"Perhaps you could try couple's counselling, or if you don't want to go along that road, maybe just sit down and tell him how you feel. He may have no idea that you feel the way you do, and it could be the kick he needs to sort his life out."

Talk about what each of you want from retirement

It may sound simple, but talking openly and honestly about expectations vs. experience goes a long way. What did you imagine would happen? How is this different? What can be done to meet your expectations? And are you thinking along the same lines?

Gransnetters say:

"My husband asked me once what I wanted and I replied that all I wanted was the time to be able to grow old with him. Thankfully, I have that."

"My husband worked very hard during his working life and I feel he is entitled to live his retirement as he wishes, just as he is happy for me to live mine as I wish."

"I would say before you retire, have a chat and share what you expect out of it, and ask him how much time he expects to be with you."

*"I think that, to really **enjoy retirement** you and your husband need to be thinking along the same lines. Will you want to do things together, or will you be happy having completely separate interests and perhaps just meet up in the evenings? Will you be taking up new hobbies or will you be throwing yourselves into volunteering?"*

"When we retired, I told my husband that I was retired too, so not to expect to be waited on hand and foot and he doesn't."

"Time together is very important, so how about sitting down together making firm plans for going out, learning new skills together, possibly weekends away and holidays?"

My husband is retired, but I work

It's one thing to have to deal with the issue of time when you have retired together, but it is an entirely different challenge when only one of you is able to, or wants to, retire. When your partner has retired, but **you are still working**, the challenge is to balance your different routines so that you feel fairly and affectionately treated. Your partner might expect you to talk to him as soon as you return from work, when all you need is peace and quiet after your work day. Similarly, you might expect a clean house and dinner on the table, but your partner has been too busy with hobbies and activities and trying to get a foothold in retirement to notice housework. Whatever your situation, make sure you each prioritise, giving the other person your attention at least once a day and that you, to the best of your abilities, express what you need your partner to do in order for you to be happy.

Gransnetters say:

"My husband decided to retire (without consulting me) when I was still working. It was made worse by the fact that I worked from home and was used to having the house to myself during the day. Suddenly, he was there all the time, asking did I want a cup of tea, to watch the cricket on TV, saying he would come with me when I went out. It drove me nuts. I had to tell him that I didn't want to be with him all the time! Put your foot down and be honest. Enjoy doing some things together, but maintain your own identity and interests."

"I feel so mean when I come home from work and I am snappy with him, but I just feel so frustrated."

"My other half retired some 10 years ago and I am still working full-time. In fairness, he does look after the domestic side of things, e.g. housework, but to get him to do any activity together as a couple is hard work and doesn't happen unless I organize it. He has no hobbies, has lost interest in the garden, DIY - it's less hassle to get someone in to do it. I look at other couples and envy their togetherness which we seem to lack. Family gatherings are not his thing so inviting people to our

home has to be carefully negotiated and I gave up on work gatherings years ago. I depend on my interests and work to keep me sane and social."

How do I get some alone time without upsetting my husband?

When you're still working, but your husband has retired, there is one thing that you definitely don't have in common any longer...the need to sit down and enjoy some downtime after work. Whether you wind down with a glass of wine and a bath or a cup of tea and a good book, you really do need that time every day and it is important that your husband understands and supports that.

Gransnetters say:

"My husband has now retired, but I am still at work. When I come home I just want some alone time, but obviously he is there all the time!"

"Have you told him how you feel? Communication is the key. Perhaps you could give him all your attention when you first get back, as he has been on his own all day. And then ask for a bit of time to do your own thing."

"I was working and my husband was at home all day. Fortunately we had a dog. So every evening straight after work I would take her for a walk. It gave me the space I needed, plus some exercise. It helped me wind down after a day of doing a very stressful job and when I returned, I felt better and was ready to communicate with my husband and listen to what he wanted to talk about."

"I would suggest that you spend half an hour with him when you first come home. Then you can both chat about your day and he won't feel rejected. Encourage him to take some hobby classes or get involved more with volunteering. Talk with him and explain that you need some alone time when you come home, but that maybe once during the work week the two of you could have a dinner out so he has something to look forward to with you. Hopefully he won't be offended by your suggestions."

How to deal with an unmotivated, retired husband

Do men really struggle more with retirement than women? We don't know, but it certainly seems that women observe men struggle with retirement to a greater extent than they feel troubled by the same issue. Whether you think that your husband misses work, feels less useful, worries about health

issues, is bored or just unhappy, you're not alone in finding it difficult to help your other half settle into retirement.

My husband has still not settled into retirement

Some people were born to retire and others, well, they need to learn how to be retired or they just never quite figure out how to enjoy it. The bottom line is that the adjustment process sometimes takes an awfully long time and that's okay.

Gransnetters say:

"My husband still hasn't settled after five years of full retirement. The problem is that he thoroughly enjoyed his work and all his free time was usually taken up with associated aspects."

"It seems to take time for some men to settle into retirement and find other things to do. When my husband retired, people used to ask him 'are you enjoying your retirement?' - they got a very grumpy 'NO' in response. However, he is now really busy with his 'projects' and voluntary work and seems much happier. It is a big adjustment and it does take time."

"My husband is somebody who lived for his work and would have carried on forever if his health hadn't prevented it. His friendships and interests were work related, so he has found retirement very hard."

My husband got depressed after retirement

Sometimes leaving work is so stressful that people start feeling depressed. This is more common than you think, and if you have a partner who is **struggling with depression** or low moods following retirement, the best thing you can do is to encourage him to seek help and help him get involved with activities such as volunteering. Often the low moods are a result of no longer feeling useful or needed, something which can be addressed by taking on a new purpose, such as looking after others or perhaps getting a dog. Whichever way you're able to suggest a change, a new start may be needed and that takes a lot of encouragement and motivational skills. If you're not able to provide this or you need support, perhaps someone in your family or a close friend can help?

Gransnetters say:

"My other half retired from a very stressful 40-hour-a-week job to nothing! He was okay for the first few months, but then his mood started to decline to the point of a terrible breakdown. It took 18 months of counselling for him to fully recover. But what really helped him was a puppy! It gave him

a sense of responsibility and he was needed again. Maybe your husband has lost his way in life and just needs to find himself again."

"It is about feeling that your 'useful' life is ending, and that you have lost much of your physical strength and fitness."

"I think it is that lack of purpose, after a long career that can sometimes cause depression."

"In our retirement we can do what we like, but my husband seems as if he is lost. I suppose the drive he has for work and achievement isn't being fulfilled."

How can I help my husband?

Is your partner finding it difficult to enjoy retirement? Whether it is a case of depression, poor health or just lack of adjustment, try to get him out of the house and involved with [new activities](#). Try **volunteering**, a local charity, **National Trust** or **English Heritage** memberships, **Mens Sheds**, **U3A** - or make a bucket list of places you'd like to **visit together**.

Gransnetters say:

*"I make a list of places we haven't visited and try to get to them midweek. Membership of the National Trust or annual tickets to concerts work well as my husband doesn't like to waste them. And **grandchildren help**."*

"If he's not happy, as my husband wasn't after three months idling, may I suggest you persuade him to take over cooking the dinner? My husband decided that, as I had done the first 30 years of cooking, he should do the next 30 years."

"The best cure is to get them involved in some outdoor activities. It could be a hobby, voluntary work or anything else, preferably involving a social side to it. My husband took up short mat bowling after he retired as it happens in the local village hall. He now knows far more local people in the village than I do!"

My retired husband does nothing

Do you feel like your husband has become a little lazy since retirement? Perhaps he never leaves the house or watches far more TV than you'd ever expected him to? Many couples find that they have different ideas of what retirement is, and while a retired partner may appear lazy or unmotivated, perhaps their idea of an ideal retirement is just to do absolutely nothing. And that is absolutely fine -

it's their retirement after all. The problem, however, is that if you had other plans, this kind of behaviour can seem selfish. So how do you go about addressing this issue?

Gransnetters say:

"Take the time to make him realise that some moments in life are not going to come back again, and that we never know how much time we have left together."

My husband never leaves the house

When someone starts to isolate themselves, such as never leaving their own home, it is not necessarily because they do not want to be outside or around others. It could be a sign that they are unhappy, depressed or perhaps have developed a form of agoraphobia. The point is, while you, of course, need to address any health concerns, this is less about their behaviour and more about how you feel about it. If you are unhappy that your retired husband never leaves the house, is it because you want some alone time at home yourself? Or because you want to do things with him outside? Or do you just think that it would be good for him to get out of the house? You need to figure out why you want him to go out more, so that when you talk to him, it will feel less like criticism and more like affection.

Gransnetters say:

"His wish really is to completely bury his head in the sand."

"Is there anything that he has enjoyed over the years that he could get involved with now he has time? Maybe you could go too/join in/visit together just in the beginning until he finds 'his feet'. Sometimes it is very hard to go along and join something on your own."

My retired husband watches TV all day

Watching a lot of TV is often a sign of boredom, or in other words, [lack of stimulation](#). The stimulation we get from watching TV is passive rather than active, which is why it is recommended that we don't rely solely on it for our entertainment. If you husband's TV habits feel out of character to you (i.e. he watches several programmes you don't actually think he is enjoying or he watches much more TV than in the past), this might be a sign of boredom. Get him motivated to do other activities, preferably ones where he is actively contributing such as DIY hobbies.

Gransnetters say:

"It's recognised as bad for a man's long-term physical and mental health to retire without a plan and face every day unstructured after being active for so long in the world of work. Their self-esteem can really suffer. Kick him out of that chair and hide the TV remote. Make him sit down with pen and paper and make that plan."

"My husband moaned today that he might as well live alone because he is always on his own. I said that is because I do not want to spend my evenings/weekends sat in front of the telly. He said he watches telly because there is nothing else to do!"

Retired Husband Syndrome

RHS, or Retired Husband Syndrome, is a stress-related condition that affects women whose husband's have retired, causing symptoms such as depression, **stress**, agitation and **sleeplessness**. While the condition itself is associated with the sudden change in work arrangements, it is the behaviour of the retired spouse that causes RHS. Women who suffer from RHS often report that their retired husbands are driving them 'mad' with behaviour such as:

- Having unreasonable and increased expectations with regards to housework (i.e. 'I was waiting for you to cook me dinner' despite have the free time to do so themselves)
- Being extremely anti-social or rude (except to others)
- Unable to do anything without their wives' approval or needing constant attention
- Complaining about everything
- Always being around and not engaging in activities outside the marriage

Gransnetters say:

"Welcome to the world of retired husbands. If it's any consolation, they do get better at it."

*"I think most of us suffer from RHS - Retired Husband Syndrome. But I married my husband and it is down to me to get a grip and make it work. A close friend of my husband has just been diagnosed with Alzheimers and that puts RHS into perspective. So whether you get a shed, get your own life or **get a divorce**, whatever you decide - if you haven't changed him in all the years you have been married, you won't change him now!"*

My husband seems unable to do anything without my approval

One of the common stress factors of RHS is when a retired husband needs constant approval from their other half. **Not only is this behaviour irritating, but it is also difficult to deal with.**

Gransnetters say:

"My husband is driving me potty! He is retired, as am I, but whereas I am more than happy with my own company, hobbies and pastimes and don't expect constant attention, he seems unable to do anything without approval."

"My husband had plenty to occupy himself with when he retired, but missed the camaraderie of the office and used to follow me around all the time. He hated being left alone if I went out. It wasn't easy."

"Mine will quite happily leave our daughter and me twiddling our thumbs in boredom whilst he watches lengthy sporting events, but woe betide him having nothing to watch when we do something on our laptops or read. He suddenly needs our attention for something or other and can't bear it if we have something to occupy us and he hasn't."

How to deal with this behavior

There may be moments where you wonder if you have the patience for retirement - or for your husband knowing how to deal with RHS will help you get through the tense moments.

"I retired first, then my husband about 18 months later. I had settled into my routine and then suddenly he was home and hated it. Life became a bit strained. There were times when I thought 'I can't stand this' and I'm sure he felt the same. This year he was diagnosed with prostate cancer (hopefully with a good outcome). Now I am just grateful that he is here. I know we can't live our lives tolerating stuff just in case people get ill, but it does put a different perspective on things."

"After years of being in contact with people from his workplace, he must feel like a spare part and is trying his best to fit into your routine. Things will ease with time and developing selective hearing is a good idea. Tell him gently that you need an hour to get yourself together in the mornings and things will get better I'm sure."

"He has a knack of waiting until I'm walking away to call me back to show me something, when only a few seconds earlier I was standing right beside him. I think this is definitely a retirement thing. After three years I'm becoming very good at pretending to be deaf."

My husband is always grumpy and complaining

The consensus among gransnetters seems to be that some men do indeed get grumpier as they get older - and that you're definitely not alone if you feel quite put out by this. From neighbours' behaviour to TV schedules, it sounds as if some men are, in general, just a little displeased with the state of things...or at least quite willing to let others know that they're dissatisfied. The problem reported by gransnetters is that much of their husbands' grumpiness seems to be reserved only for them and not other people. So how do others experience this behaviour and what can be done to address it?

Gransnetters say:

"My husband takes the weather very personally. If it's raining, he stomps around in a real strop. And when it's very windy - ye gods - stay out the way. He is also rude about news readers on the television and I always miss half of what they are saying. He can be a laugh one minute among friends, but sadly is a grumpy old man when no one is around. I just ignore him most of the time."

"I have just listened to a rant about cleaning up after a dog, and I had to remind him that we don't have one."

"My husband is distinctly more grumpy when he is tired and pretending he is fine. Maybe they were always grumpy, but as they were at work all day we didn't see them enough to notice?"

"It's normal. I think the older they get, the grumpier they get. I think they find old age hard especially if they've been fit and sporty when younger. I tell mine that it isn't going to get any better so to stop moaning about it and make the most of what he has now."

*"Without sounding too alarmist, if this mood change is out of character, it could be a sign of depression or an early stage of **dementia**. If it's got to the stage of not wanting friends around because of his rudeness, I'd be inclined to seek some professional guidance."*

"He could be worrying about something or perhaps he is bored and doesn't see what the rest of his life is going to be. Perhaps he has pains. On the other hand, maybe he has just settled into being a grumpy old man."

How to deal with a grumpy, retired husband

There is no one way to deal with a grumpy and unpleasant partner, but there are many coping mechanisms you can adopt to help the situation. First, have you talked to your husband about how his

behaviour makes you feel? Is he depressed or in pain, and could there be a medical explanation for his change in personality? Secondly - bear with us - do you give him enough attention? Adjusting to retirement can be very tough for those who have had demanding careers and having lost that, they may need frequent reminding of how valued they are. Finally, what can you do for yourself to feel less affected? Have hobbies, meet with friends, go shopping alone - or just spend a couple of hours in a part of the house that is yours and yours alone. The most important thing to remember is that, your husband may not know the extent to which he is annoying or upsetting you and an explanation goes a long way. Perhaps you could even develop a code word or two for when he crosses the line, which you can use and he can respect.

Gransnetters say:

"I used to ask him what was wrong, but he just kept saying 'nothing's wrong' and become even grumpier. So now I just ignore him until he snaps out of it, which he usually does, thankfully, after a few hours."

"My husband is definitely nicer to me when I've been away for a few days. I think he realises how much he'd hate life without me. Space is the answer."

"'Whatever' is the reply I give if he is really getting on my nerves and that usually makes him realise that he is doing it again. They don't mean it - they don't even know they are doing it! And of course it helps that I have a good friend just down the road and we can sit and moan together! Wine helps too."

"I will never sweat the small stuff, or even the bigger stuff. Yes, he is irritating on occasions. No, I am not a walkover. I'm just so happy he is still here because life would be unbearable if he wasn't. After 42 years together, I keep looking at him and feeling so grateful and appreciative."

Our housework tasks are not fairly divided

While many couples are now sharing housework between them, it is not uncommon to find a slight predisposition in older men to thinking that even after retirement, 'the home' remains a wife's domain, and with it, all the cooking and cleaning. With gransnetters reporting that their husbands 'can't find anything in the kitchen so wouldn't know where to start' and 'not being able to dust properly', it is perhaps not hard to see why these sorts of conditions are enough to drive someone a little mad.

Gransnetters say:

"I'm due to retire this time next week and my husband can hardly wait. He thinks that dinner will be on the table, slippers will be warmed, house will be pristine and I will be waiting for him at the door in my negligee. I'm afraid he's got a bit of a disappointment coming."

"My husband dries the pots occasionally, and takes out the wheelie bin each Wednesday night (I have to bring it back though on Thursday morning). Apart from that, he does virtually nothing. He's one of those old school men who thinks that 'men work and women look after the house and kids'. Even though he's no longer working that still seems to apply."

"He had never done any housework while he was working, but I assumed (wrongly) that he would do his share after. He never did a thing except made a mess, leaving 'stuff' everywhere i.e. newspapers, jumpers, shoes, used cups, apple cores - it drove me mad. I also got the 'what are we having for lunch?' while he sat reading his newspaper. I felt as if I had been transported back to the 1950s."

My husband has more leisure time than I do

It is easy to start feeling resentful if you don't feel that the housework is equally shared between the two of you. While there are some men who are indeed stuck in a 1950s mentality, there are many more who feel that they are sharing the load - but sometimes without actually doing so. So why is this? It could be down to how the housework has been shared in the past or a lack of awareness or understanding of the amount of tasks which needs doing. One common theme is the fact that many husbands start dedicating themselves to 'projects' when they retire, something which may have been encouraged by their partners in order to help improve retirement satisfaction. Unfortunately, sometimes this has the side effect of taking over their time and energy, leaving all the housework with their partners. Perhaps whoever said women multitask better was right after all...

Gransnetters say:

"My husband is so busy with his 'important' projects he has no time to help me! He is not a selfish man, he just does not see housework as being important enough to stop what he is doing."

"I do all the washing, ironing and cooking. My husband will Hoover as I can't lift the Dyson and I do the rest of the cleaning. I feel he has more leisure time than I do."

"When my husband first retired he wasn't keen on the idea of cooking, but he did at least think he'd give it a go for a couple of nights a week. However, eight months in he seems to have conveniently forgotten this. We're talking about my retiring later this year and he seems to think it will be back to like when the children were babies; he went out to work and I did all cooking, cleaning, stay-at-home-mum stuff. I'd hasten to add that he isn't lazy, very much the opposite, but is too busy with his projects to even think to do the ordinary day to day stuff."

"Seeing this conversation a few days ago was a revelation. I was becoming a little resentful because my husband seems to have a lot more leisure time than I do. After reading your ideas I drew up a spreadsheet of daily, weekly and monthly tasks. We divided them up, colour coded it and stuck it up in the kitchen. I think my husband was surprised at what tasks exist and how many of them he didn't feel confident enough to do!"

I end up doing most things myself

Has your husband ever said that you do something - house-related - better than he does? Or, has he ever done something so poorly you thought 'I might as well do this myself'? There are only two ways forward: either you do it yourself to the standard you like or you settle for the standard your partner offers. To quote gransnetters, some men are just born without '**the noticing gene**'. Of course there are many men who see and do their fair share and much more...but still not quite as many as there are women who do the lion's share.

Gransnetters say:

"My husband has recently retired and I thought that we should share some of the domestic tasks. However, so far I have found that it is easier and less stressful to do everything myself! If I send him shopping, he buys all sorts of things that we don't need, often things he bought 'in case we needed them' and so he has had to take them back. He loves gadgets and is a sucker for any 'special offer'. He mopped the kitchen floor once and nearly flooded us out. If he tries to cook something, I have to tell him what he needs, where it is and how to do it! He also uses every pan or dish in the house. He hasn't tried the laundry yet...and he doesn't notice anything that needs tidying away."

"My husband will very occasionally wash a few dishes (only if he has 'cooked' something though) and I think he has pushed the vacuum cleaner around twice. It gets my back up when I walk in from work to see nothing has been done."

“My hubby does all the cooking and enjoys shopping too. I feel a bit put out that he gets to do the chores he loves. I get to do everything else. Cleaning toilets and washing floors is no fun at all.”

I wish I didn't have to ask

Perhaps you're fortunate to have a husband who is happy to help...when asked. In itself that can be quite challenging. Why should you have to ask to get help? Well, you might need to ask when your partner can't see what needs doing. Whether that is a lack of the 'noticing gene' or a difference in standards, at the end of the day you have to ask yourself, would you rather ask and have it done or not ask and do it yourself? If your husband didn't notice the dirt when you first got married, he won't see it now...

Gransnetters say:

“He says I only need to ask and he'll come, but sometimes I wish I didn't have to ask.”

“I work part-time and my husband recently retired. I still do the bulk of housework as he does not seem to notice mess, but he will Hoover and dust if I ask him to.”

“He will help when I ask him, which is usually with tasks that require more physical strength than I have. I think it's partly that he just doesn't notice what needs doing, and partly that he doesn't care enough if he does notice.”

“My husband was brought up to cook and do chores. We have been together for 50 years and he has always done his share of cooking. But like most men, he doesn't see mess and dirt which means he never cleans unless told to, but he also never complains if I don't clean.”

“My husband did teach himself to cook, well, to follow recipes to the letter. Unfortunately he didn't teach himself to clean up afterwards. Is there a book about how to clear up after cooking a meal?”

“My husband will say 'Do you want me to do... FOR YOU?' Eh? For me?”

To-do lists and other solutions

So how do you solve this issue of unfair division of housework? Do lists and charts work or will it need to be a more in-depth solution? It depends on your marriage and how willing you both are to compromise. Sit down with your partner and talk through what you would like done, what you expect from each other and how you suggest you divide it. You could for example discuss which tasks you

enjoy and which you don't, making sure that the division is something you both think is achievable and fair.

Gransnetters say:

"I think a daily to-do list would be a good idea if he genuinely can't see what needs to be done. You'll probably have to be quite explicit to avoid the scenario where the washing is still in the machine when you get home."

"We agreed there was a difference in the ability to notice things and he was more than happy to have a to-do list. We have our own tasks now (he routinely cleans the bathroom, floors and windows, vegetables and washes up anything that needs it and makes tea and coffee) sometimes we swap about and we often share tasks. Try suggesting alternatives, would you like to do A or B? You never know, there may be a hidden talent."

"I've been teaching him to cook and made him a recipe book of his favourite meals. So I have now introduced 'you cook it Monday', where he has to plan, buy and cook a two-course meal without any help from me. Lower your standards and turn a blind eye and start the division of labour."

"I'm slowly learning not to criticise the quality and just admire the quantity. I do say, once a week, 'It's your turn to cook tonight' and praise the results. To be fair, he's the gardener and I just admire the results so I guess it's more or less a fair division of labour."

"Since he took early retirement I just leave a list and most things get done. The only downside is he needs praising for everything, even leaves the Hoover out so I know he's used it!"

Shared chores - it is possible...

"I suppose I was lucky as my husband and I shared 'tasks' throughout our working lives. He always washed up. The bathroom was his job, same with cleaning the kitchen floor, the windows and often hoovering. Rest was down to me, although we shared cooking. I think it's important when you both work full-time to share everything or it leads to resentment and it makes retirement easier."

"I think it's right to share household tasks when both of you are retired, but that should include the whole range. My husband mends things, does all the heavy work in the garden, washes cars, cleans out the gutters, cleans the windows i.e 'man' type jobs. I clean the house, do the washing and ironing, weeding in the garden and lighter jobs. We share the cooking and grocery shopping - he cooks at the weekend and I cook in the week."

"It took my husband a few years after he retired (at 62) to become 'domesticated'. Now he always prepares breakfast and lunch, often cooks dinner and always makes the tea/coffee. He's got a dab hand at hoovering too! I never thought I'd see the day, but miracles do happen!"

"My husband retired over 10 years before I did (health reasons) and so took his domestic duties very seriously; he went to a cookery class, did all the shopping, ironing etc. We tend to share the cooking (it's something that I enjoy). What I need to remember though is to keep on lavishing praise for everything he does - his roast potatoes are far better than mine for example. He's made the Christmas puddings, the cake and the mincemeat. I'm really enjoying our shared retirement, so not prepared to hire him out, though I'm sure I'd have lots of takers."

How to give each other space in retirement

Ask any retiree who feels that they have a successful marriage and they will say that space is the key. Your space, his space - it is the most important thing to sort out in your relationship when this phase of your lives begin. One piece of advice cropping up again and again is to **start planning** and organizing how you will each spend your time when you first retire and to talk through retirement expectations. How much time will you spend on hobbies? How much time together? What sort of activities do you want to take up and are there any you could share as a couple? This could be anything from **travelling** to volunteering at the same charity.

If you feel that your need for space is greater than your husband's, it is important that you communicate ideas for how this could be solved. Don't forget to make the time to give him your affection daily and if you leave the house unexpectedly, leave a note. Especially in the beginning, it is a good idea to remember that your spouse may need your support and encouragement to get going with this new phase of their life. If they are struggling with motivation, help them get out of the house. Encourage hobbies and projects such as work needed in the garden. Volunteer his or your combined time at a voluntary organization or event and bond over it. And finally, make sure you take all the time you need for yourself.

Gransnetters say:

"It does take time to find the right balance between enjoying new things together and giving each other space."

"I think it is very hard if one person has been independent with a very busy spouse, to then suddenly become 'velcroed' to them in retirement. You just have to give each other space and say 'you go on your own or with a friend, I need this time for myself'."

"Both my husband and I are semi-retired and I still do not have enough time to myself. I just have to try to make the time. When he is watching TV, I go and have a bath and read for an hour. I send him to the shops with a long shopping list. I go down to Costa with my Kindle and sneak in a bit of time there. I think you will gradually get a bit of space, but it takes time. Just remember though, that one day he may not be there to be annoyed with and you could regret not spending enough time together."

"Personal space is the answer to a lot of problems I feel."

"The shed idea is a good one; get him to build it first, making sure it has heat, light, a comfy chair, wi-fi, maybe even draught beer on tap (and a loo) and you can have the house to yourself again. Why didn't I do that?"

"In my opinion, the most important thing to do before hubby retires is to jointly come to an agreement that as well as going out together, you have plenty of independent time."

"My husband plays golf and I don't so we don't spend all our time together and I think that is the key."

"Does he have a hobby or pastime? Golf? Fishing? You need to find something that gets him out from under your feet. My friend's husband spends a lot of time organising activities for a men's club and my brother-in-law researches and writes about historical subjects. Luckily, since my husband has long been my ex, I don't have this problem. There used to be a vogue for pre-retirement programmes and courses in order to prepare employees for what is a big turning-point in their lives."

"Much as I love him, being with my husband all day, every day can get trying and I make sure to keep in touch and meet up with friends without him."

"He has to accept that he's retired now and he'll either have to develop new interests or get a shed and stay in it for most of the day!"

***"I spend a lot of time in the garden.** I make a lot of jam and preserves. I love my husband dearly, but he doesn't seem to feel the same need for a bit of solitude as I do."*

"I used to love soaking for ages in a hot bath just to remove myself from my husband's questions. It gave me time to reconcile with my own feelings."

*"I don't know how fit you are, but I can recommend HF walking holidays, on which there are always several single people, mainly women 'of a certain age'. They do short or longer breaks in the UK or abroad, also some for special interests. Pricey, but you don't need to spend a thing while you are there. When married **I used to go away alone several times a year.**"*

"It's all about compromise; I can escape to my daughter's house for the day if I feel I need space, then when we are in the same room at night, at least we have something to chat about. We also have another sitting room where I go if there is football on the telly."

We disagree about downsizing after retirement

Downsizing is hard work physically, but it is also a difficult concept to get on board with emotionally. To acknowledge that you are getting older and that you have - or soon will have - different needs to live comfortably is no easy feat. If you are trying to convince someone to downsize due to health reasons, remember that it may take your spouse some time to get used to the idea, particularly if it is about their health needs. Slowly take on the discussion and arm yourself with examples that would have a positive effect on your lives, such as **saving money** or being closer to family.

Gransnetters say:

"It's the strain of the negotiations and the process that is so destructive to the relationship. In some ways, it's like having to persuade someone to think about a care home. I do not want to end up in that situation with my husband, because eventually I won't be able to care for him in this house."

"I desperately wanted to relocate to be nearer my family, but my husband would not even discuss moving, until I had an accident and injured my back. This has restricted what I can do, especially when it comes to physically helping him. This really has been a revelation to him. I am not suggesting you have an accident, but have you tried appealing to his better nature and telling him you simply cannot cope where you currently live? Maybe if you stop coping so well, it will open his eyes and make him change his mind. Have you got any family or close friends who could maybe back up your argument in a subtle way?"

"We were able to buy a lovely house which is much cheaper to run, fuel bills are less than half of what they were, so we now have the money to do more. We don't regret our move at all. The house is also such that we could make adaptations and live downstairs should we need to. Yes, it took me a while to come round to it, but it just takes a bit of time to get used to the idea, for men and women. Maybe it would help to find a few examples that introduce the idea of how much easier life could be and how much money could be saved."

Husband refuses to face health and mobility problems

Trying to convince a spouse with failing health to downsize may take time - and a lot of patience. If he is not ready to discuss his limitations, focus your arguments on your own needs and try to keep his health problems out of it. If there is an area that you think he will respond well to, such as saving money or no longer needing help with X, Y and Z, use those facts to build your case and let him mull it over and get used to the idea. Don't pressure him into making a decision, but wait for him to acknowledge your needs. If he doesn't come around, perhaps you could consider asking family or close friends for support to help bring him round to the idea.

Gransnetters say:

"The problem is that my husband can't accept our increasing limitations. He won't cooperate or discuss this without arguments, so I am completely worn down attempting to talk about it. When I eventually persuaded him to view a flat which met most of our needs, he was really rude to the estate agent and refused to even consider it."

"Some people do not want to face the evidence that they have health and mobility problems. It reminds them of their mortality and possible memories of parents and relations getting old and vulnerable and possibly the irritation they felt when they saw older family members becoming unable to do things. Could you make a lot of the discussion about you, about what you are having difficulty doing, if necessary, exaggerate your problems, express your desire to move, rather than emphasise his problems."

"Would it be a good idea to not mention it for a month and see if it has sown a seed? Have you any children? Could they talk to their dad? Perhaps he needs more time to come to terms with his failing health."

"We moved two years ago to a bungalow from a five-bed family home in the country. We were managing - just - but should have moved eight years previously following my husband's heart attack."

He was in denial for a long, long time about his health and staying in our house was helping him feel 'normal'. He made a very good recovery regarding his heart, but he does have PVD to contend with. What finally tipped the balance was money! We were paying for more help every year and my husband finally agreed enough was enough. Our bungalow suits us perfectly and even the garden is low maintenance."

"It took my husband some years to get into the mindset of downsizing. I talked about it now and again and let the idea grow. Once we had started sprucing up the house, with a view to selling, he started to make comments like 'when we sell'."

"If he's anything like my husband he'll mull it over and then think it was his idea. Some men don't like to be told, stubborn so and so's."

Downsizing vs. making house adjustments

So, should you downsize or just make the necessary adjustments to your house? Or perhaps a combination of both? It depends entirely on you and your partner's situation and the needs you have now and those you think you'll have in the future. Can you afford to stay in your current place of living? Would you be able to manage physically where you are? How much help would you need if you stayed and **how much would it cost**? What would be the pros and cons of moving - and staying? And finally, you might also want to consider the emotional impact it will have on you to move out of your home.

Gransnetters say:

*"We know that we will be able to manage where we are. We had two neighbours whose health declined for different reasons and both were able to stay at home. One had a stair lift fitted and the other had the integral garage made into a bedroom and wet room. There are lots of gardening services available locally, but we are adjusting the garden as we go to make it easier to manage. Our house is on the flat, decent shops a few minutes away and a bus service to town at the end of the road. Although internet shopping is brilliant. What I'm saying is, you have to start planning for *this much earlier than you think.*"*

"I have thought about adapting our present home (I dread the whole process of moving!), but our home's location, which was fine for us when we moved here - fit and in our late 50s - is the biggest problem."

"Although we can cope well in our house at present, I can foresee the day when we will need to move to something smaller and more convenient. I've known more than one old person who refused to face

up to their future accommodation needs. What usually happens, is that some crisis occurs which makes it necessary for them to be rehomed as an emergency, and they end up in accommodation they don't like and would not have chosen. It's a worrying prospect."

"How about help in the house? This can take many forms i.e cleaner, gardener, window cleaner, decorating. Having people in to help can not only relieve you of much physical effort, but cost a lot less than moving house, which is eye-wateringly expensive now."

"One of the disadvantages of downsizing when you retire is that you may not have your own space."

<https://www.gransnet.com/relationships/how-retirement-affects-marriage>