

Senior Living



Ready to Downsize?

A three-bedroom, two-bathroom ranch house with a sprawling yard makes sense for families with kids and a dog and bikes and extra cars.

For empty-nesters, though, that big, beautiful house often just becomes a list of Saturday morning chores — mowing the yard, cleaning more bathrooms than you use on a regular basis and vacuuming bedrooms that no one is sleeping in but are filled up with old belongings you think about getting rid of but haven't.

Retirement offers a good opportunity to downsize the house into something more manageable and less expensive. Kiplinger talked to experts about the questions to ask yourself and priorities to consider as you're looking for a new place.

CONSIDER WHAT YOU WANT

Do you just want a smaller space? Or is locating closer to amenities or in a certain area your top priority? You may want to consider a townhouse or condominium or other property with a homeowner's association to lessen the amount of upkeep you're responsible for. If you want to spend less on a mortgage, you may have to compromise on location or amenities. Knowing



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what's most important will make shopping easier.

CONSIDER YOUR TIMELINE

If you've been in the same house for 30 years, you've likely accumulated 30 years of stuff. Give yourself a reasonable timeline to pack, purge and

clean your house to get it ready for sale. You should also look at the real estate market in your area and the area to which you're relocating. If you hit a market slump, it could be worth waiting to see if the value of your home will increase. Talk to a Realtor about what you can reasonably

expect to get for your home and how much it will cost you to sell and then buy a new home.

LOOK INTO ADULT COMMUNITIES

Active-adult or continuing-care retirement communities may be the right step.

These offer lots of amenities and more of a community feel. CCRCs provide assisted living and skilled-nursing facilities. These offer different payment methods, such as simply paying for rent and then paying out-of-pocket for other care as needed or contracts with an upfront fee for lifetime care.

Become a Road Scholar

Retired and ready for your next adventure? Look no further than Road Scholar, a nonprofit organization that offers travel, educational opportunities and other experiences for seniors.

The program, started in 1975 as Elderhostel, offers more than 5,500 learning adventures, taking scholars on trips to 150 countries throughout the world, with the aim of educating, introducing people to each other and to different cultures.

These trips are planned with different levels of fitness, finances and experience in mind, with the organization planning the itineraries. Each trip is staffed by faculty experts who take scholars to the usual and not-so-usual attractions of a city or region and let them experience the food, history, customs and lifestyle. Trips are available for solo travelers, couples or groups, and the cost includes lodging, many meals, gratuities and group transportation. On international trips, the organization takes care of airfare as well.

If you're ready to explore the world, Road Scholar offers nature hikes through Costa Rica, a maritime journey in Croatia and Slovenia, or hiking through the Canadian Rockies or Cinque Terre, Italy. For the more historically minded, explore the Caribbean island of Martinique or visit Cuba or the Chesapeake Islands in Maryland. If you want to stay closer to home or take a less expensive trip, learn about the ecology of the Channel Islands National Park off the coast of California or go on a five-day rejuvenation retreat.

Want to explore a little further? Trips



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include time for independent exploration or optional learning adventures that you can add to your itinerary.

Or, if you want to make Road Scholar an intergenerational experience, check out Grandparent Journeys, which allow you to take your grandchildren with you to swim with sea life in Mexico, go

back in time at Colonial Williamsburg or explore the many facets of Paris. There are trips suitable for children as young as 4 years old.

Of course, not everyone has room in their budget for an extended trip. There is financial aid available; Road Scholar offers scholarships to people

who want to go on an adventure but cannot afford to. The organization also has caregiver grants to help those who are caring for a sick, disabled or elderly family member pay the costs of arranging substitute care.

For more information, visit www.roadscholar.org.

Healthy Living

Staying healthy and sharp as you get older will contribute to living a longer, more fulfilling life. While many of the habits that keep you healthier in your earlier decades will continue to serve you well as you get older, seniors need to be careful with high-impact exercises and should be aware of different risks.

EAT RIGHT

The AARP actually suggests eating like you have diabetes — don't eat after 7 p.m.; get rid of the bottom bun when eating hamburgers or other sandwiches; keep nuts in your bag or glove compartment so you have something healthy to snack; use mashed avocado in place of mayonnaise on sandwiches and use whole wheat bread; and replace noodles with quinoa or barley. Talk to your doctor about the number of calories you should be eating daily.

FIND THE RIGHT EXERCISES

As long as you're able to do it, brisk walking remains a great way to burn calories, get your heart rate up and keep your muscles and joints active. It's not the only exercise that's low impact and good for seniors, though. AARP suggests tai chi — a form of martial arts that combines slow, graceful movements and meditation that been connected to a variety of health and fitness benefits. The biggest of those benefits is the exercise's ability to improve balance and prevent falls. A 2015 study also found tai chi can help seniors avoid osteoarthritis.

Tai chi, as with all exercise, can help reduce stress as well



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as give you more energy for the rest of your activities.

KEEP YOUR BRAIN SHARP

Memory slowing down is a normal effect of age. According to Healthbeat, a publication of Harvard

Medical School, using the brain is critical to keep your memory sharp. Use all of your senses; repeat or write down information you want to retain; continue learning, either through classes, books, online programs, going to

museums or joining a book club; or make a mnemonic device to help you remember things.

WORK WITH YOUR DOCTOR

As you age, your risk of

Alzheimer's and dementia increases, as does the risk for cancer, arthritis and many other conditions. Talk to your doctor about changes in your body or symptoms related to depression or other mental conditions.

Social Security Basics

Most Americans who work pay into Social Security, which is designed to help people save for retirement. The payment is automatic, but applying for benefits takes some time and effort — and lots of paperwork.

The U.S. Social Security Administration's website, www.ssa.gov, has a retirement estimator that helps users estimate their monthly benefits, learn their full retirement age and make informed decisions about the process.

WHEN SHOULD I GET SOCIAL SECURITY?

Workers who have paid into Social Security can get retirement benefits as early as 62 years old, but they will see reduced benefits if they cash in before full retirement age, which for most people is 66. Waiting until 70 to start benefits will result in increased benefits.

The SSA recommends applying for benefits four months before you want those benefits to begin. You may want to do this even if you are still working when you reach full retirement age; it could mean more money for you. If earnings for the prior year are higher than one of the years used to compute your benefit, the SSA will redo that calculation and make the increase retroactive to January the year after you earned the higher way. This could result in higher survivors benefits as well.

If you receive benefits while working, the amount you get may be reduced depending on your income.



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WHAT PAPERWORK DO I NEED?

To apply, you need your Social Security number, birth certificate, W-2 forms or self-employment returns for the previous year, military discharge papers, if applicable, and birth certificates and Social

Security numbers for your spouse and children who are applying for benefits. The need for records doesn't end when you're receiving your benefits. Notify the SSA if you move, get married or divorced, change your name, adopt a child, have a change in citizenship status

or start receiving a pension.

WHAT BENEFITS CAN MY FAMILY GET?

If your spouse or child qualify, they may receive a monthly payment up to half of your full retirement benefit. This will not cut your benefit amount.

Children may qualify if they are minors, full-time high school students who are 18 or 19 or have a disability that started before age 22. Spouses who have not paid into Social Security also may be eligible if they have reached full retirement age.

What to Know About Medicare

Medicare is a federal health insurance plan that working Americans pay into through payroll taxes. It is a valuable benefit, as most Americans' health insurance is tied to their jobs, thus leaving a hole when workers retire, but enrolling in and navigating the program can be a daunting task.

The AARP has a Medicare Question and Answer Tool to walk people through the plans Medicare offers, what health care coverage you need and can afford, and the timeline you should expect as you are signing up.

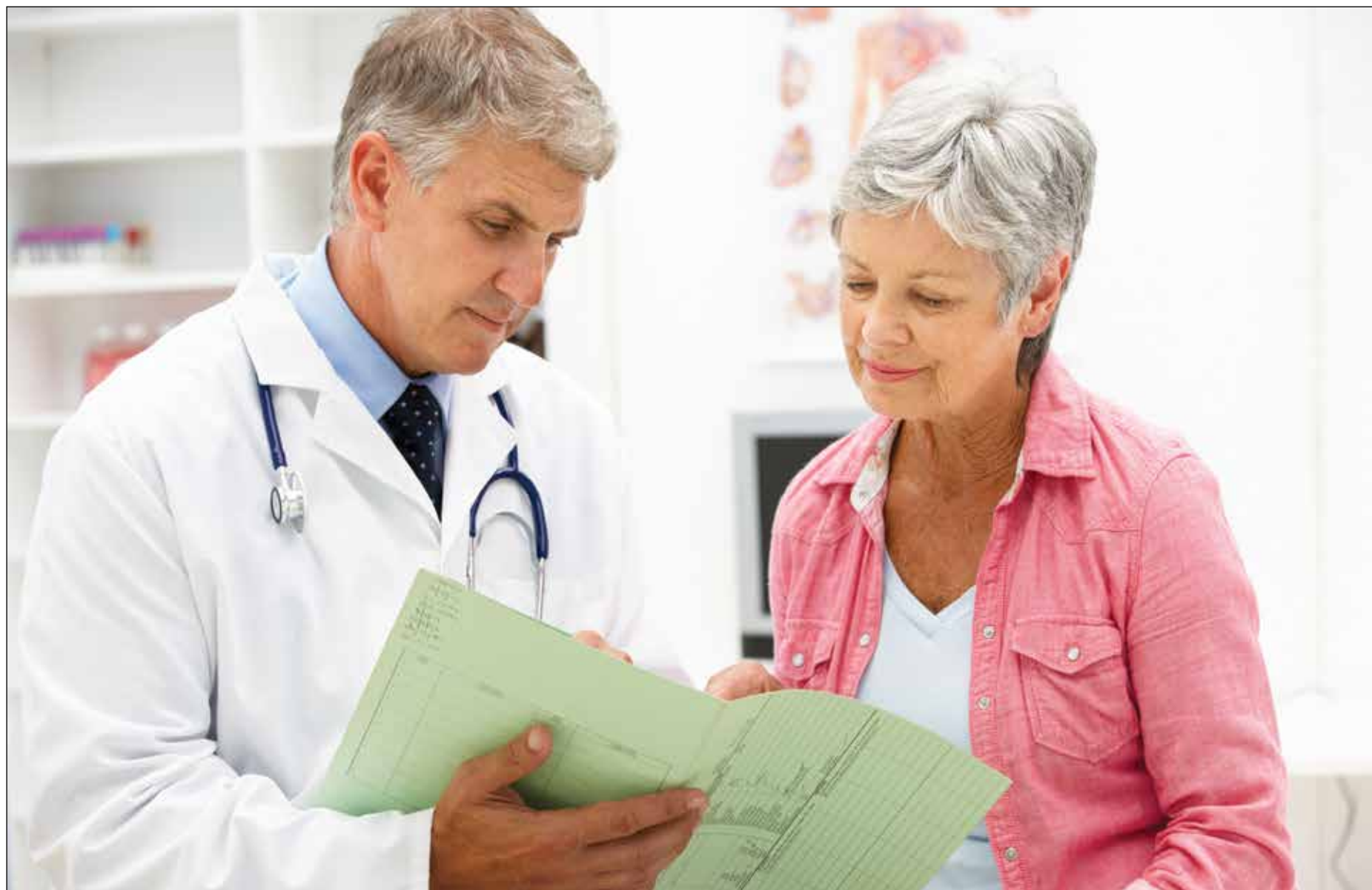
BASICS OF MEDICARE

At age 65, Americans are eligible for Medicare. There are four parts:

- **Part A (hospital):** Helps pay for the cost of hospital stays and time in short-term skilled nursing facilities, hospice and home health services.
- **Part B (medical):** Helps pay for doctors, outpatient and preventive care and certain medical equipment.
- **Part C (Medicare Advantage):** An alternative coverage option that puts all your Medicare benefits into one plan.
- **Part D:** Helps cover the cost of outpatient prescription drugs.

If you or your spouse have earned a minimum of 40 work credits through paying Medicare payroll taxes, you won't pay monthly premiums for Part A insurance. Work credits aren't necessary for Part B or D services, though there is a monthly premium for those.

Like traditional health insurance, Medicare does not



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cover all health care costs. Plans have different deductibles, premiums and copays. Your income also may be a factor on how much you pay.

HOW TO SIGN UP FOR MEDICARE

Even after paying payroll taxes and turning 65, most

Americans still must apply for Medicare. The initial enrollment period lasts for seven months, with the fourth month being the month you turn 65. You should sign up during this period if you have no other health insurance or have insurance you bought yourself; you have retiree ben-

efits from a former employer; you have COBRA coverage or veterans' benefits; or you're in a nonmarital relationship and covered by their insurance. If you enroll before your 65th birthday; your coverage begins on the first day of the month you turn 65. If you enroll after, there is a delay.

A special enrollment period is available for people who have health insurance past the initial period and allows them to delay enrolling in Part B until their previous coverage ends. There also are exceptions for expatriates or people who are covered through a spouse's insurance.

Living Your Best Life

Americans dream of retirement — time to sleep in, take naps, finally do gardening or projects or take trips. We imagine retirement offering all the opportunities working 40 hours a week detracts from. And you should definitely take time for all the relaxing you want, then find ways to fill those hours and allow you to enjoy your post-work life.

MarketWatch has a few suggestions for making the most of your senior years.

GET A JOB OR VOLUNTEER

OK, maybe this isn't your first stop. But a post-retirement job may give you the opportunity to try something new and perhaps less stressful, or working a part-time position in something fun. It also provides additional income, which many Americans would benefit from during their retirement years.

Volunteering also is a great way to be involved in your community. Libraries, schools, museums, hospitals and non-profits are always looking for volunteers. You could even use your expertise acquired from working to help out a small business.

FIND (OR REDISCOVER) A NEW SPORT OR HOBBY

A pickup basketball game after a long day of work when you work at home can be exhausting. A pickup game without that long day of work can be energizing and a lot of fun. Learn to golf, go fishing or boating, play tennis, go biking, join a team (check out the National Senior Games Association if you want some real competition) or reacquaint yourself with the local gym or hiking or walking trails.



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Regardless of your level of fitness, you can find some sport or exercise that fits.

Retirement is also a great time to find a new hobby. If you've always been interested in cooking but never had much

time to experiment, now you do. Take up gardening, learn to play the piano, take dance lessons or take up painting.

TRAVEL

These might be jetsetting

trips to Europe, Asia or Australia; or weekend trips to the local national parks, the cities around you, or visiting friends and family throughout the country. It could even be packing up a camper and

driving the country, exploring the nooks and crannies of the United States that tourists often overlook.

Why not use the freedom of retirement to scratch the travel itch?

Get Paperwork in Order

Planning for their own death is no one's favorite activity, but having the right paperwork and information in the right hands can make a difficult time somewhat easier for family members and the executor of your estate.

The National Institute of Aging offered a number of factors to think about, some of which most of us probably haven't considered.

COLLECT YOUR IMPORTANT PAPERS AND PUT THEM IN ONE PLACE

Important papers include birth certificates, passports, wills and deeds to property but also account information for every bank account, including retirement accounts; insurance information; copies of Medicare and health insurance cards; information for safe deposit boxes; military records; living wills and other items. Make sure family members know where to find these.

MAKE A WILL, INCLUDING A LIVING WILL

Regardless of how many assets you have, you should have a will. This allows you to designate the person you want your property to go after your death.

A living will lays out your desires for health care if you become too sick to make your own decisions or make them known. You can state what kind of care you do or don't want, such as how much treatment you want in the event of a terminal illness or if you want to be resuscitated. This will help your wishes be carried out and make the decision easier for family members



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faced with difficult decisions.

TALK TO YOUR LAWYER AND DOCTOR

To make things easier, talk to your doctor about what you would like to have happen with end-of-life decisions and give them permission to share

information with a family member. Make sure your legal documents are up to date; have your lawyer look over wills, trusts and advance directives like a power of attorney.

TALK TO YOUR FAMILY

Make sure someone knows

where paperwork is kept and what you want with health care. This is also a good time to discuss potential funeral plans, including costs (many funeral homes will allow you to pay funeral costs with life insurance, which decreases the financial stress of a death),

and take steps to allow a trusted person to have access to your assets. You may want to put a family member on one or more of your bank accounts, which will allow them to have access after your death. If not, those assets may be frozen for a time.