

Men retire to Mars. Women retire to Venus.

Although the share of men and women saving for retirement is the same, the way they plan for retirement differs. Here are steps women can take to plan for retirement.

By Amelia Granger, *Contributor* / May 25, 2013



A couple strolls through Camden, Maine, a small coastal town often cited in lists of best retirement places. Typically, the way that men and women plan for retirement differs.

Robert F. Bukaty/AP/File

The differing attitudes of men and women toward financing retirement may not be as stark as other differences denoted in the 1992 bestseller “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.”

Both sexes are equal when it comes to having saved for retirement: 66 percent, according to the most recent Retirement Confidence Survey from the Employee Benefit Research Institute. They're statistically equal when it comes to having an individual retirement account (46 percent for men, 47 percent for women) and contributing to a workplace retirement savings plan (40 percent, 36 percent).

But there's one big area where they differ: confidence.

When the survey's 1,254 adults were presented with the statement “you will have enough money to live comfortably through your retirement years,” 17 percent of males agreed. Only 10 percent of females agreed.

Confidence plays an important role in financing retirement. It allows investors to move a portion of their funds into stocks, which are more risky than super-safe bonds, but also far more likely to deliver growth and beat inflation over the long term. But it can also work against retirement success. Having a methodical nature may be more important than confidence, financial planners suggest.

“Our women clients tend to be more conservative and cautious in their decisionmaking with us,” says Jeff Vistica, a certified financial planner based in Carlsbad, Calif. “I notice that men, more so than women, have a tendency to claim themselves as investment ‘experts’ and are less inclined to admit a lack of knowledge in a given financial area.”

While men may be more optimistic, women are often more realistic, says Michelle Brownstein, a vice president at financial advisory firm Personal Capital Corp., based in Redwood City, Calif. “I get the impression that men tend to think a certain dollar amount will provide them with a lifestyle to which they are accustomed, while women tend to look at the bigger picture, such as whether they will have to pay for a medical crisis or if their husband dies before they do.”

These differences may change as new generations take up retirement planning.

“Most of the baby boomer women grew up with traditional role models – and many of us opted for taking on the traditional role of the primary caregivers in our families, deferring our career aspirations, or giving them up completely,” says Jean Schwarz, a certified financial planner and managing director of Lumina Financial Consultants in Vienna, Va. “I think we will see a bigger shift in subsequent generations as women grow up with different role models.”

For women who are not feeling confident that they're [saving enough for retirement](#), there are steps they can take.

“My best advice is to get as much information as possible about your current financial status, taking account of all that is owned and all that is owed – and timing of expected income and expenses,” says Ms. Schwarz. “Then use this information to determine how big the gap is between where you are, and where you think you should be at this point in time. The sooner one takes account of their personal financial situation, the better able she is to make changes to affect a better outcome.”

Women may benefit from working with a female financial adviser. “The path to more confidence includes getting some good information and understanding,” says Bonnie Sewell, a certified financial planner based in Leesburg, Va. “Start by sitting down with a woman adviser and figure out what you think you need in retirement, then make a plan to improve your situation.”

– Amelia Granger is a senior analyst at NerdWallet, a personal finance website whose Ask an Advisor service offers a new way to connect with [financial advisers](#).