



Turning 65, Then and Now

One thing is certain: It's a whole different world.

by: Judi Hasson | from: [AARP](#) | January 5, 2011



If you're part of the first crop of baby boomers turning 65 this year, you probably remember a time when you could smoke a cigarette anywhere you wanted, your health insurance plan covered any doctor you decided to see and the thought of wireless Internet access was a subject for science fiction.

Times have changed. Now that you're touching down in a brave new world, you're facing health and lifestyle challenges, a revolution in technology and the prospect of economic uncertainty as you head into your golden years.

Here's a look back at the way things were in 1980, when the parents of today's boomers began to retire, and today's new reality:

Then: You could retire at 65 with full [Social Security benefits](#).

Now: The golden age is 66.

Then: There were 19.5 million retirees receiving an average of \$905 a month, adjusted for inflation, from the Social Security Administration.

Now: 34.6 million retirees receive an average of \$1,175 a month.

Then: You received an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) in your Social Security benefits and you could depend on that every year:

Now: There's a COLA freeze.

Then: [Medicare](#) didn't pay for prescription drugs.

Now: They're now covered under Part D with an extra fee.

Then: Medicare Part B premium was \$23 a month, adjusted for inflation.

Now: It was \$96.40 in 2010.

Then: You could earn money in saving accounts because of double-digit interest rates.

Now: Rates are about as low as 1 percent.

Then: A 1996 survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute found the percentage of retirees in 1996 that were very confident they would have enough money to [live comfortably throughout their](#)

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retirement stood at 30 percent.

Now: The same survey taken in 2010 found only 16 percent believed they would be financially secure throughout their golden years.

Then: 2.9 million people had [Alzheimer's disease](#).

Now: 5.3 million people suffer from this devastating illness as the population of older Americans swells.

Then: [Sexual performance](#) problems were rarely discussed in public, and there weren't many treatment options.

Now: Commercials for "ED" drugs flood the airwaves, and consumers are responding: Between 2006 and 2009 alone, Viagra sales in the U.S. grew 21 percent to \$994 million.

Then: Your health plan didn't focus on [preventive care](#), diet or quit-smoking programs.

Now: Prevention is the name of the game for every health plan. Some plans even charge smokers more for premiums.

Then: If you had arthritis in your hip, you likely endured chronic discomfort. **Now:** You can opt to have your hip replaced with titanium parts.

Then: About 84 percent of Americans has a defined benefit pension in 1980.

Now: Only 33 percent had a pension in 2009.

Then: The Internet was largely unknown, and most people relied on the U.S. mail and a wall phone to communicate, and on radio, TV and newspapers for their information.

Now: 17.5 million people over 65 use the Internet and growing numbers get their news and information from websites, connect with one another on [Facebook](#) and talk to grandkids via [Skype](#).

Then: In 1980, 17.2 percent over the age of 65 smoked.

Now: The figure is down to about 9 percent.

Then: The Sun Belt was the retirement dream: In 1980, 492,528 people migrated to Florida, while 195,707 left.

Now: In 2008, more people left the Sunshine State than moved there: 413,357 moved in, 438,085 left.

Then: Most people retired by age 65, and then [pursued travel](#), relaxation and hobbies.

Now: In a recent AARP survey, 31 percent of people who were working said they had "retired" from a previous job. And 40 percent said they planned on [working "till they dropped"](#). Many boomers talk about ["re-invention"](#) as a top retirement priority.