

The Three Stages of Retirement: Planning for Your Go-Go, Slow-Go, and No-Go Years

After working with hundreds of retirees over the years, I've witnessed a beautiful truth: retirement isn't a single, static phase of life. Instead, it unfolds in three distinct stages, each with its own joys, challenges, and financial considerations. Understanding these stages, what we call the "go-go," "slow-go," and "no-go" years, can help you plan not just financially, but emotionally for the journey ahead.

The Go-Go Years: Embracing Freedom and Adventure

The go-go years typically span the first decade of retirement, roughly ages 65-75, when health is good and energy is high. These are the years my clients dream about during our planning sessions, the time for that European river cruise, the cross-country RV trip, or perfecting their golf swing with regular rounds of golf.

During these years, you're likely to spend more than you initially expected. This isn't a planning failure; it's the natural expression of newfound freedom. You're not just maintaining your pre-retirement lifestyle, you're actively investing in experiences and dreams that were deferred during your working years. I've seen clients renovate their homes, spoil their grandchildren, and dive headfirst into hobbies they never had time for before.

Financial Planning for the Go-Go Years:

This stage calls for *permission-based planning*. Your financial strategy should intentionally account for higher spending during these years. I recommend giving yourself permission in advance to enjoy this phase, understanding that you're exchanging a portion of future financial security for meaningful experiences today, and that's perfectly okay, within reason.

Consider keeping a larger cash reserve during these years, as you'll likely be more spontaneous with purchases and travel. This is also the time to front-load major expenses like home improvements or that dream vacation while you can fully enjoy them. Your investment portfolio should maintain growth potential, as you'll need it to fund the later stages.

The Slow-Go Years: Finding Comfort in Routine

The slow-go years, typically ages 75-85, bring a natural settling into quieter rhythms. I watch my clients during this phase find deep satisfaction in smaller pleasures, daily walks with their spouse, regular coffee dates with friends, tending to their gardens, and being present for family milestones.

This stage often brings the sweetest rewards of retirement. You've adjusted to your new identity, found your pace, and discovered what truly matters. The frantic energy of the

go-go years gives way to a more contemplative, relationship-focused lifestyle. While you may travel less, you might find yourself valuing comfort and convenience more highly.

Financial Planning for the Slow-Go Years:

Your spending typically moderates during this phase, often dropping to 80-90% of your pre-retirement income. However, this is when we start seeing increased healthcare costs beginning to factor into your budget. It's crucial to have a robust healthcare cost strategy in place, including consideration of supplemental insurance and health savings account optimization.

This is also when many of my clients begin thinking more seriously about legacy planning. You're no longer accumulating wealth for your own future—you're stewarding it for the next generation. Your investment allocation may become more conservative, focusing on preservation and steady income rather than growth.

The No-Go Years: Dignity, Comfort, and Care

The no-go years, generally starting around age 85, require the most careful financial planning, yet they're often the most overlooked. During this stage, health may limit mobility and independence, but the need for dignity, comfort, and quality care becomes paramount.

This phase isn't about limitation—it's about ensuring you can face whatever comes with grace and without becoming a financial burden to your family. I've seen clients find profound peace in knowing they're prepared for this stage, both financially and emotionally.

Financial Planning for the No-Go Years:

Healthcare costs can rise significantly during this stage, especially if long-term care becomes necessary. In many areas, the average cost of a private room in a nursing home now exceeds \$100,000 per year. This is why securing long-term care insurance during your earlier working years can be so valuable.

Your spending on experiences and travel may decrease, but costs for care, comfort, and medical needs will likely increase. I recommend maintaining liquid assets specifically earmarked for healthcare and care costs. Your investment strategy should prioritize stability and income generation over growth.

Planning with Heart and Wisdom

The beauty of understanding these three stages is that it allows us to plan with both our heads and our hearts. You don't have to choose between living fully today and preparing for tomorrow, you can do both with thoughtful planning.

I encourage my clients to have honest conversations with their families about their hopes and concerns for each stage. Discuss what "aging well" means to you. Talk about your values around independence, family involvement, and legacy. These conversations inform not just your financial plan, but your entire approach to retirement.

Remember, these stages aren't rigid timelines, they're guideposts. Some clients remain in their go-go years well into their 80s, while others may need to adjust their plans due to health changes. The key is building flexibility into your financial plan while preparing for the most likely scenarios.

Your Retirement, Your Way

Every client's journey through these stages is unique, shaped by health, family, interests, and circumstances. What remains constant is the importance of planning for all three stages from the beginning. When you understand that retirement is a journey with different phases, you can allocate your resources, both financial and emotional, more thoughtfully.

The goal isn't just to have enough money to survive each stage, but to thrive in each one according to your values and priorities. With proper planning, your go-go years can be adventurous, your slow-go years can be peaceful, and your no-go years can be dignified and comfortable.

Your retirement story is still being written. Let's make sure each chapter is financially secure and deeply fulfilling.