

This one weird trick to unlocking wealth



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I'm sure you've seen ads and articles online promising "this one weird trick to unlocking wealth" in retirement. I've got another one for you.

Most retirement planning and preparation focuses on finances. Eligibility is generally straightforward, and so the next set of questions typically examines whether one has enough money.

Do you have enough years in your annuity? Did you squirrel away money in your Thrift Savings Plan your entire career? Can you afford health insurance? Can you afford to provide a survivor benefit? Can you afford to not provide a survivor benefit? When

should you start collecting Social Security? Should you retire in time for the Special Annuity Supplement, or wait for the extra 10 percent at age 62 with more than 20 years of service?

It turns out that the keys to maximizing your annuity and Social Security benefit is to start collecting them, and then live a very long time. It may be obvious on its face, but it bears repeating. Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) and Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) regular annuities, as well as regular Social Security benefits, do not expire or stop. There is no deadline or maximum benefit one can collect. That is, as long as one continues to live.

So, there's the rub we don't always think about. Living a long and healthy retirement is the "one weird trick to unlocking wealth." A typical retiree of 30 years of service can easily receive more than \$30,000 a year in benefits just between FERS and Social Security. Multiply that by 34 years of retirement and you've got a cool million. Not bad. This doesn't include earnings or withdrawals from the Thrift Savings Plan, or any other benefits earned outside of the Postal Service. To make a retirement last 34 years or more, and to actually enjoy those years, you'll need to live a healthy lifestyle (and get a little lucky). While we spend most of our time thinking about our financial investments, we should be sure to spend time investing in our health.

Staying active is one of the most important things a retiree can do. Activity engages the mind, the body and the spirit. Naturally, each person will have their own preferences, but one should attempt to cover all these aspects, with multiple activities as needed.

A number of retirees have decided that they still want to work in some capacity. Work can help motivate a person

to stay active, be productive, and spend time with others. Of course, work has a side benefit of bringing in some more dough. Some look to a part-time job that they enjoy, such as working at a gardening center or a woodworking store, where those align with one's interests.

Others find that staying connected to a community is key. Whether it's social interaction from clubs and organizations, board games, volunteering, or sports such as the local golf league, there are unlimited options for staying connected to others and give you something to look forward to between events.

Coming from a life of unionism and solidarity, some stay involved in their NALC branch. This can provide retirees the opportunity to mentor others, share their experiences and wisdom, run the annual food drive, or maybe help other members learn about their benefits, such as the Mutual Benefit Association.

Let's not forget plain old exercise: weight lifting, yoga, walks in the woods, spin class, whatever floats your boat. Improving physical strength and the cardiovascular system go a long way to protecting joints and organs so one can stay active the rest of the day—sharpening the axe, so to speak.

Diets are high on the list of important factors to living a long life. Eating a variety of healthy food helps protect against many chronic noncommunicable diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and even cancer. Reducing foods like salt, sugars, and saturated and industrially produced trans fats are essential for a healthy diet, according to the World Health Organization. Let's not forget that heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, and if we're looking to maximize our financial benefits, we need to minimize our risk of heart disease and other ailments.

A vital component not to be overlooked is to make regular visits to your doctor, dentist and optometrist to head off or mitigate any potential health problems. Catching problems early and seeking treatment puts you in the best possible position to do so.

Retiring is a major life event. It can be difficult for those who retire but haven't figured out what they want to do after they hang up the satchel. As much as possible, active employees should prepare for their new phase of life by building the retirement life they want, before they retire. And like anything, there will be normal ups and downs, so don't expect it all to be Instagram perfect and smooth sailing. It may take some work and adjustment to settle into this new and wonderful phase of your life. Retirement should be a time of happiness and joy. You've earned it, so make the most of it and invest in your health.