

A guide to women's unique financial planning challenges and how to overcome them





Introduction

We've made huge progress with gender equality in the past few decades, and women arguably have more social influence than ever before.

For example, *HR Review* reports that there was an 83% increase in female CEOs and women serving on the board of companies between 2018 and 2023¹. Similarly, in 2024, women act as heads of state in 26 different countries around the world. This is a remarkable leap forward considering we couldn't even open a bank account without a man's signature in the UK until 1975.

Alongside these huge strides in gender equality, attitudes towards women's roles in the world of finances and work have changed significantly too. According to Statista, the female employment rate was 72.1% at the end of 2023² and it's predicted that there will be a "great wealth transfer" in the next few years as 60% of British wealth will be in the hands of women by 2025³.

However, it's important to remember that gender inequalities still exist, and we've only recently gained more independence over our finances.

So, despite the progress we've made, you might still be disadvantaged compared to men and face some unique financial planning challenges as a woman. For example, we:

- Statistically have lower financial confidence than our male counterparts and are less likely to take risks when investing, possibly because we've had fewer opportunities to engage with investments in the past
- Are often financially reliant on our partners as we may be paid less or take on a greater share of caring responsibilities, which affects our earning potential
- Have less in our retirement savings on average than men of the same age because our earnings may be lower and we're more likely to take a career break for childcare
- May be less likely to have adequate financial protection
- Are often at a financial disadvantage during a divorce

This guide will explore these challenges. As financial planners our job is to help you both prepare for them and help you overcome them, so you can build wealth and achieve your goals now and in the future.

¹ 08.05.2024 [Female CEOs and women on boards have increased by 83%](#) HR Review

² 19.04.2024 [Employment rate in the United Kingdom from 1st quarter 1971 to 4th quarter 2023, by gender](#) Statista

³ 19.04.2024 [Are women key to your future business?](#) Schroders

Women are statistically less financially confident than men

Although we now have greater financial freedom and more opportunities to control our wealth, women often still don't have the same confidence that men do when making decisions about money.

Traditional gender roles and established power structures meant that women in previous generations simply weren't allowed to make important decisions about money. As a result, they didn't have the opportunity to build knowledge and confidence in financial matters in the same way that men did. Some of these restrictions can still have an impact on women today, and while we're legally empowered, we still might not have the knowledge and confidence of our male peers.

Being excluded from the world of finance in this way means that we tend to underestimate our own abilities and may lack confidence when managing our money. We see the same phenomenon happening with male-dominated jobs, where women can feel apprehensive about working in those industries.

So, even though attitudes are changing, and we can make more financial decisions, some women still feel that they don't have the confidence to manage their wealth.

According to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) 2020 Financial Lives Survey:

- 24% of women reported having “low confidence in managing money” compared with just 20% of men
- 42% of women had “low knowledge of financial matters” compared with 32% of men
- 82% of women had “low willingness to take risks” compared with 69% of men⁴

And in many heterosexual couples, men still make most of the decisions.

In fact, a YouGov poll found that 1 in 3 UK women in relationships are financially dependent on their partner⁵. On top of this, a study from Aqua found that only 24% of couples in the UK discuss finances on a regular basis⁶.

This “confidence gap” could perpetuate the false idea that men are better suited to handling the household finances. It also means that we haven't had the opportunity to engage in many different areas of financial planning, and we're at a disadvantage as a result.

Fortunately, this lack of confidence is rooted in outdated stereotypes that we've consistently overcome in the past few decades. So, if you can engage with financial planning and build your knowledge, you can take control of your wealth and manage it just as well as your male counterparts.

Here are some excellent ways to do this.

⁴19.04.2024 [Gender, confidence, and Covid-19](#) FCA

⁵19.04.2024 [One in three women in relationships are financially dependent on their partner](#) YouGov

⁶19.04.2024 [What are the couple's spending habits in the UK?](#) Aqua



Understand your priorities and financial goals

If you want to take control of your finances, it might be useful to begin by thinking about your priorities and financial goals in life. Perhaps you want to start a business, or buy a second home? Maybe you'd like to spend time travelling with your family?

You'll probably have a mixture of short- to medium-term goals, including paying off debts or going on holidays, and longer-term goals including funding your dream retirement.

When you understand what's important to you in life and what you want to achieve, you can make financial decisions that align with those goals.

Make joint decisions about money with your partner

If your partner makes all the financial decisions in the relationship, your goals and aspirations might not be considered.

It's important that you make decisions together and ensure that your own financial goals take equal precedence to your partner's.

This might result in some challenging conversations if your financial aims don't align completely. But if you learn to navigate these difficult conversations, you can make sure your goals are on an equal footing with your partner's.



Save an emergency fund

An emergency fund offers a crucial safety net to help you cover unexpected costs such as home or car repairs. It can also be useful if you lose your job and can't earn an income for a short period. If you don't already have one, saving an emergency fund could give you more financial resilience. Most importantly, it allows you to absorb short-term financial shocks.

That's why you might decide to keep an emergency fund separate from your partner, so that you're always in a position to support yourself.

Typically, it's sensible to save three months' worth of expenses in an emergency fund, although you might feel comfortable keeping more than this.

Start investing for the future

Investing for the future could help you build wealth, and also give you the confidence to take longer-term decisions about your money.

You may want to work with a financial planner to understand different investment products and start building a portfolio that aligns with your financial plan.

This might be beneficial later when you start planning for the future.

The average woman has less in retirement savings than a man of the same age

Preparing for retirement is a crucial part of financial planning. It's important to build your savings so when you finish working, you can fund your dream lifestyle without making sacrifices. You might need to think about other expenses such as care costs or supporting family members, too.

Unfortunately, we have, on average, less in our retirement savings than men. This is because we often face pay inequalities and normally take on a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities.

Figures from the UK government show that the “gender pension gap” is currently 35%⁷. This means that men have 35% more in untapped pension savings than women at the normal minimum pension age of 55 (rising to 57 in 2028).

According to *Today's Wills and Probate*, only 71% of women over 40 have a pension at all, compared with 83% of men⁸. This could mean that many women have a shortfall in their savings and can't afford to live their desired lifestyle in retirement.

There are a few potential reasons for the inequality in pensions. Understanding these causes could help you overcome the imbalance and increase your retirement savings.

Firstly, we might be paid less than men as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reports that the “gender pay gap” was **7.7% in April 2023**⁹. So, even when we're paying into a pension, we might be contributing less than our male peers because our earnings are lower, making it harder to build a healthy retirement fund.

To add to this, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) reports that we're seven times more likely to be out of work due to care commitments¹⁰. If you take a career break, you might miss out on valuable pension contributions. It could be harder to progress in your career after a break too, which might mean your peak earning potential is lower and you can't contribute as much to your pension.

Luckily, with the right planning, you may be able to overcome the disadvantages you face and make sure that you have enough savings to fund your retirement.

Here's how.

⁷19.04.2024 [The Gender Pensions Gap in Private Pensions](#) UK government

⁸19.04.2024 [Women's pension pots 'worth half of men's'](#) *Today's Wills and Probate*

⁹19.04.2024 [Gender pay gap in the UK: 2023](#) Office for National Statistics (ONS)

¹⁰19.04.2024 [Women 7 times more likely than men to be out of work due to caring commitments](#) Trades Union Congress (TUC)

Take advantage of tax relief and employer contributions to your pension*

When you contribute to your workplace or private pensions, you usually automatically receive 20% tax relief at source. This means that a £100 contribution effectively “costs” you £80 and the government pays in the other £20 as tax relief.

Did you know?

The [Pension and Lifetime Savings Association](#) estimates that a single person needs £43,000 a year to achieve a comfortable retirement and a couple needs £59,000.

If you're a higher- or additional-rate taxpayer, you're entitled to 40% or 45% tax relief, taking the cost of a £100 contribution down to £60 or £55 respectively. You need to claim the extra 20% or 25% through self-assessment.

You might also benefit from employer contributions when you pay into a workplace pension.

It's important to take advantage of this while you can and consider increasing your pension contributions if you can afford to. This could help you to build the retirement savings you need.

Figures from Standard Life show that a person working full-time from age 22 on a salary of £25,000 a year and paying the standard auto-enrolment pension contributions – 3% employee, 5% employer – would have £434,000 in their pension at 66.

But, if they increased their contribution by 2%, they would have £542,000 when they were 66 – an increase of £108,000¹¹.

This demonstrates how even a small increase in your pension contributions could make a big difference in retirement.

It might be useful to increase your contributions in the lead up to a career break to maximise your pension savings.

Bear in mind that your pension Annual Allowance – the total amount you can contribute to your pensions each year without triggering an additional tax charge – is usually £60,000 or 100% of your earnings in the 2024/25 tax year.

*19.04.2024 [Picture Your Future: Retirement Living Standards](#) Pensions and Lifetime Savings Association

¹¹19.04.2024 [Boosting monthly pension contributions by 2% could leave you £108,000 better off in retirement](#) Standard Life



Ask your partner to contribute to your retirement savings during a career break

If you're taking on a disproportionate share of childcare duties, meaning you take a career break while your partner continues working, you could be at a disadvantage. Even if you pay into a pension while you're working, you'll miss valuable contributions while you're not working and this could affect your retirement.

Luckily, you could protect yourself and secure your retirement savings by asking your partner to contribute to your pension on your behalf.

The contributions are treated as if you'd made the payments yourself, so you benefit from tax relief as you normally would.

Having your partner pay into your pension ensures that you don't fall behind with your retirement savings while you take time out to raise a family.

Bear in mind that any third-party contributions count towards your Annual Allowance, which may fall if your income changes. Your Annual Allowance in 2024/25 is £60,000 or 100% of your earnings, whichever is lower. As a result, the threshold may match the amount you receive in maternity pay if this is less than £60,000.

However, if you take a longer break and you're not earning at all for a certain period, your Annual Allowance will typically fall to £3,600 (2024/25).

Make sure you receive your full State Pension entitlement

In 2024/25, the full new State Pension is £221.20 a week. This amount usually increases each year by one of:

- Average earnings growth
- CPI inflation
- 2.5%

The State Pension payment rises by whichever of these figures is highest and is often referred to as “the triple lock”. You also receive payments for the rest of your life, so it’s a useful supplement to your private and workplace pensions.

However, you only receive the full amount if you have 35 “qualifying years” on your National Insurance (NI) record.

A qualifying year is any year in which you:

- Were working and paid NI contributions (NICs)
- Received NI credits – if you were caring for a child under 12 or a vulnerable adult, for example
- Paid voluntary NICs.

If you take a career break or can’t work for a period, you may have gaps in your NI record. You might have NI credits for those years if you were caring for a child under 12, but only if you claimed Child Benefit during that time.

The good news is that you can typically pay voluntary NICs for the previous six tax years to fill any gaps and ensure that you receive the full State Pension when you retire. It may be useful to check your NI record and fill any gaps if you have fewer than 35 qualifying years.

Building knowledge about tax-efficient opportunities can help women push back against the structural disadvantages that prevent us from building wealth to the same level as our male peers.

Women could be less likely to have adequate protection than men

Protection can act as a safety net to help you deal with the unexpected and continue working towards your goals, even if the worst happens.

If you have an illness or injury that means you can't work, you may struggle to cover your general living expenses. You might also be unable to contribute to pensions and other savings, and this could affect your lifestyle in retirement or, in some cases, prevent you from retiring altogether.

Similarly, if you die unexpectedly, your family could be left in a difficult financial position if the household income falls. They might have large expenses such as a funeral to pay for too.

The right protection could help in these situations as it ensures that you can continue meeting your short-term financial obligations and working towards your long-term goals. More importantly, it allows you to do that without relying on anybody else, so you retain your financial independence.

Unfortunately, many people don't have suitable cover – particularly women, as we're slightly less likely to invest in protection than men.

Research from the Post Office revealed that 51% of women have life insurance, compared with 56% of men¹². Additionally, *Cover Magazine* reports that, while 16% of men do so, only 11% of women hold or are applying for income protection¹³.

Some of the different types of protection that you might benefit from could include:

- Life insurance
- Critical illness cover
- Income protection

Protection is usually cheaper when you're young and healthy, and you never know when the unexpected could happen. So, you may benefit from investing in protection as soon as possible if you haven't already.

¹² 19.04.2024 [The nation's relationship with life insurance](#) The Post Office

¹³ 19.04.2024 [Only 11% of women hold or are applying for income protection: The Exeter Cover Magazine](#)

Women could be more likely than men to face estate planning challenges

Making plans for your wealth – collectively known as your ‘estate’ – for when you pass away is important for several reasons. It ensures your assets are passed on to the people that you intend and can avoid any difficult legal issues for your family.

Without clear instructions about how your estate should be divided, the courts might make decisions on your behalf and your family may need to go through a lengthy legal process before they have the right to administer your wealth.

Planning ahead could also help you reduce the financial burden on your family. This is crucial as SunLife reports that the overall “cost of dying” reached £9,658 in 2023¹⁴.

The good news is we’re actually more likely than men to think about estate planning. According to *Today’s Wills and Probate*, 51.7% of women had a will in 2020, compared with 46.2% of men¹⁵.

However, it’s important to consider the tax your family are likely to pay on your estate and find ways to mitigate this, so you can pass on as much as possible to your loved ones.

Our estates might be more likely to have an Inheritance Tax (IHT) liability than men’s, meaning that our families could pay more tax - FTAdviser reports that women’s estates are liable for £430 million more in IHT than male-owned estates¹⁶.

This may be because, according to the UK government, we outlive men by an average of 3.9 years¹⁷. As a result, we often inherit the estate from our spouses first, and then pass it to our families when we die. This means that we’re more likely to pass on a large amount of wealth and it falls to us to overcome estate planning challenges. Unfortunately, if we don’t have the knowledge to implement an IHT mitigation strategy, it could leave our families with a large bill.

¹⁴ 22.04.2024 [Funeral costs in the UK](#) SunLife

¹⁵ 22.04.2024 [Closing the Gender Gap on Wills and Lasting Powers of Attorney](#) *Today’s Wills and Probate*

¹⁶ 22.04.2024 [Poor planning means women pay more inheritance tax](#) FTAdviser

¹⁷ 15.05.2024 [Men’s Health](#) UK Parliament

Luckily, if you work with your financial adviser and follow these estate planning steps, you can make sure you protect your legacy and retain control over how your wealth is handled after you're gone.

- Discuss estate planning with your family – Organising your wealth as a family and explaining your wishes can help you avoid potential estate planning mistakes.
- Write a will – A clear will outlines your wishes so your wealth is distributed in the way that you intended. It could also prevent complications for loved ones when you're gone.
- Create a Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) – An LPA allows you to choose who controls your wealth and makes important decisions about your care if you're not capable. This is crucial as it allows you to protect your assets and ensure somebody you trust manages your affairs.
- Plan for IHT – Our estates are more likely to trigger an IHT charge so it's important to consider ways to mitigate a large tax bill, including lifetime gifting or trusts.
- Gather important paperwork – Collecting important paperwork such as your will, details of pensions and investments, and your LPA makes it easier for your executors to administer your estate and follow your wishes.



We may be more likely to face financial difficulty after a divorce than men

No one expects to get divorced, but it's sensible to prepare against the possibility; a divorce is a huge emotional challenge for everybody involved and it can take a long time to adjust to your new life afterwards. Unfortunately, we're often at a financial disadvantage after a divorce so we have more difficulties to overcome than men.

According to Legal & General, we see our household income fall by an average of 41% in the year after divorce, while men only see their income drop by 21%. We're also more likely to waive our rights to our partner's pension during a divorce, which could actually be the most valuable asset you have between you¹⁸.

This means that, after a divorce, you might be left in a difficult financial position. Most importantly, you could find it hard to continue contributing to savings and pensions, so the divorce may have a knock-on effect on your long-term goals.

Fortunately, if you take control of the situation and work with your adviser, you can secure your own financial future.

Here are some important steps to consider:

- Create a list of your assets – Knowing precisely what assets you have, including joint wealth, could improve your chances of an equal split during divorce negotiations.
- Include all pensions in the negotiations – Splitting pensions equally means you may be more likely to stay on track with your retirement savings. There are several ways to split a pension during divorce so it's important to discuss the options with your adviser.
- Write a personal budget to reflect your new situation – Moving from a dual-income to a single-income household could mean you need to adjust your spending. Writing a new budget may help you continue working towards your short, medium and long-term goals.
- Seek professional advice – Seeking professional advice could help you navigate the challenges and disadvantages of the divorce process, so you come out the other side in a strong position.

¹⁸ 22.04.2024 [The Divorce Gap – women see their household income drop twice as much as men, following divorce](#) Legal & General

We are here to help you overcome the unique financial planning challenges that women face

If you want to feel more empowered when managing your wealth and pursuing your financial goals, we're here to support you. We can address the unique financial planning disadvantages you may face and find ways to overcome them.

If you need support with any of the issues outlined in this guide, please get in touch with your adviser to learn more.

Alternatively, if you're yet to work with an adviser, you can use the contact page on our website to find an office near you.





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A pension is a long-term investment not normally accessible until 55 (57 from April 2028). The fund value may fluctuate and can go down, which would have an impact on the level of pension benefits available. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

The tax implications of pension withdrawals will be based on your individual circumstances. Thresholds, percentage rates, and tax legislation may change in subsequent Finance Acts.

Workplace pensions are regulated by The Pension Regulator.

The value of your investments (and any income from them) can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance.

Investments should be considered over the longer term and should fit in with your overall attitude to risk and financial circumstances.

Note that protection plans typically have no cash in value at any time and cover will cease at the end of the term. If premiums stop, then cover will lapse.

Cover is subject to terms and conditions and may have exclusions. Definitions of illnesses vary from product provider and will be explained within the policy documentation.

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