

**J**UDGING BY THE letters I receive, the idea of sharing a house with other people conjures up a whole host of different emotions in us all. Some of us relish the companionship that cohabitation brings while others value the freedom of their own company above everything else. Of course much of this reaction depends on exactly who you are contemplating sharing a home with and what that new relationship will mean to your quality of life. Most of us – whatever our ages – have our routines; our ways of doing things; and a TV or radio programme that we simply can't live without. Our anxieties about living with others are often based on how these factors will be affected – and if we'll be able to “do our own thing”.

In the UK, cohabitation with a spouse remains the most common form of house-sharing. By retirement age most couples have spent a lifetime getting to know each other's little quirks and habits and have developed time-honoured strategies to deal with each other's idiosyncrasies. I'm always amazed how couples with wildly different opinions manage to cohabit with great success. Through my work delivering countless presentations on pre-retirement I've witnessed the common misconception that couples grow similar in regards to interests and tastes as time passes. I recall a couple at a seminar many years ago. They were trying to decide what sort of property to buy for their retirement. She wanted an old cottage – he wanted a new estate home. She wanted a small garden – he wanted at least an acre. She liked pastel shades – he liked vibrant colours. I can't help but wonder if they ended up in a black and white flat at the seaside in the end!

However, it's not just married couples who are faced with decisions and compromise on matters of the home. Many of us



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## THE Cohabitation Quandary

WHO you live with can be just as important as WHERE, says David Moxon.

will need to make decisions about sharing our homes with an elderly parent or about playing an increasingly important role in the upbringing of our grandchildren. The rise in the number of single parent families has changed the “give ‘em back at the end of the day” type grandparent role to a much greater “hands-on” parental function. Frequent overnight stays, school collections, dinners, packed lunches and teas are often required from grandparents due to the demands of the modern-day working life. Studies show that this part-time cohabitation with grandchildren not only helps to keep grandparents fit and ‘mentally young’ but benefits their physical health as well.

Often, retirement can include a decision to ‘downsize’ your property. Swapping your four bedroom detached family home for

a flat on a development or within an apartment courtyard or development can mean changes. Once there was just you and your spouse to consider, now you have a close-knit neighbourhood of twenty others. Great when you want someone to play bridge with; have a natter with; keep an eye out for your property when you're away.

So whether its living on your own or with a spouse, looking after grandchildren or downsizing your house, the secret recipe to success seems to be, always be willing to try something new and don't forget liberal helpings of ‘give and take’. See you in the New Year.



David Moxon is a British health psychologist and specialist in pre and post retirement health and behavioural issues.