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HOME > RELATIONSHIPS > **NEW TREND: SENIOR ROOMMATES**

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New Trend: Senior Roommates

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Women are turning to home sharing to find companionship among female senior roommates. Learn how finding a roommate can be beneficial.

When Gloria Flores' husband passed away in 2009, she decided to rent out the studio apartment within her San Francisco home to help manage expenses.

Through a home sharing program, a service that matches clients that have space available to clients who are looking for a place to rent, she found Linda Clark, 64, who was starting over after a divorce. A grandmother of two, Clark works nights and is home during the day.

"I have a separate entrance and small kitchen as well as a washer and dryer," Clark says. "Home sharing works very well for me because rent in San Mateo County is over the top."



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The arrangement has been helpful to Flores as well, especially since the 85-year-old had a stroke last year. During her hospital stay and month-long rehabilitation, she had the comfort of knowing that Clark was by her side.

“Linda is very helpful,” she says. “When I was in rehabilitation, I could call her and she would bring me what I needed. I like knowing she’s around. We cooperate with each other.”

Clark and Flores are part of a growing trend of women choosing to share households later in life. Four million women age 50-plus live in U.S. households with at least two women older than 50—a statistic that is expected to rise. With an increase in housing costs and a need for companionship, shared housing can be a win-win for many seniors.

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The advantages of roommates for senior citizens

Women live five years longer on average than men. On top of that, the trend of gray divorce is on the rise: Since 1990, the overall divorce rate for the 50-plus demographic has doubled, according to the [National Center for Family & Marriage Research](#). More than one-third of women ages 65 and older now live alone due to divorce, loss of a spouse to death or the decision to remain single, according to a 2012 American Community Survey from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#).

Living alone means leaving all the bills and home maintenance to one person—without the security of having someone near in case of emergency.

Beyond the benefits of security and having an extra hand to help with household tasks, home sharing creates a sense of community that women tend to lose when they live alone.

“Women are more inclined to be social,” says Tamara McClintock Greenberg, a clinical psychologist at the University of California, San Francisco. “Even before this trend took hold, many women had phone trees to keep tabs on one another. If you didn’t hear from someone within two days, you’d call her.

Greenberg says socializing is good for the health and can help us live longer. A study by the University of California, San Francisco found that aging adults who don’t socialize regularly have a 59 percent greater risk of experiencing a health decline as well as a 45 percent higher risk of



dying.

“Home sharing is a way to be social at a time when life may become more isolating,” Greenberg says.

Roommate agreement guidelines

Before you embark on a joint housing venture, spell out your expectations ahead of time. Use this checklist to determine your preferences:

- Determine if you would enjoy sharing your living space. If not, consider a communal building where you can have neighbors close but not in your home. “You have to have the kind of flexible personality where you can be able to room with someone,” Greenberg says. “Some women want to be around other women all the time, while some just need their solitary time.”
- Decide if you’d like to room with someone you already know or if you’d like to find a roommate. If it’s someone you already know, make sure it’s someone you already get along with. “Conflictual relationships are not good for your health—don’t room with someone you fight with all the time,” Greenberg says. If you’re beginning the search for a roommate, visit nationalsharedhousing.org to find a shared housing agency in your area.
- Decide whether you’d prefer to eat meals with your roommate and state your preferences.
- Clearly outline how you want to handle expenses and household tasks before entering a shared housing agreement.
- Set boundaries for pets, smoking and overnight guests.
- Know the other person’s health care preferences in the event of a medical emergency.

Still trying to decide if you can handle a shared housing situation? Check out [The Right Time: Moving into Senior Living Communities](#) by our sister site, thebegrup.org, and hear some residents of be.group senior living communities share their experiences and advice.

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