

January 2009

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here to help you



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**No selling. No jargon. Just the facts.**

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No selling.  
No jargon.  
Just the facts  
about your  
pension – it's  
time to choose.

**MONEY**madeclear™  
from the Financial Services Authority (FSA)

With our **MONEY**madeclear™ range of guides, we cut out the jargon and give you just the facts about financial products and services, helping you to make an informed decision.

## Just the facts about your pension – it's time to choose.

We try to ensure that the information in this guide, some of which comes from sources outside the FSA, is correct at the time of print. It is possible that some of it is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes in the law. You should check the current position before you take any action.

This is general information to help you make financial decisions. It is not advice, and cannot take account of your individual circumstances. When making decisions about your own circumstances you should consider whether to consult a financial or other professional adviser.



The Financial Services Authority (FSA)  
set up by government to regulate financial  
services and protect your rights.

# This guide is for you if

You are

**approaching retirement; and**

You have

**a pension fund with which to buy a lifetime annuity.**

It's about buying an annuity and:

- explains what you need to think about when choosing one;
- sets out how you can shop around to get the best deal for you; and
- answers some of the questions you may have.

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# Buying a lifetime annuity

## A lifetime annuity converts your pension fund into pension income, which you'll be paid for the rest of your life.

When you're approaching retirement your pension provider will write to you with details about your pension fund. They'll tell you about using your pension fund to buy a lifetime annuity.

It's important information, so read it carefully and ask your pension provider or financial adviser about anything that isn't clear.

See the *Jargon buster* on page 17 for an explanation of some words you may come across.

## It's time to choose

There are several important decisions you have to make now, including:

- whether to delay buying an annuity or taking any pension income for now;
- where to buy it from to get the best deal – you don't have to buy it from your current pension provider;
- what sort of annuity to buy – one just for you or one to include a pension for your spouse or partner when you die;
- whether to take a tax-free lump sum from your pension fund first; and/or
- whether to go for one of the other pension income options – see page 9.

## Commutation

If the total of all your pension funds does not exceed a minimum amount (£16,500 in 2008/09, going up to £17,500 in 2009/10), you can take it all as a cash lump sum instead of an income. You must be at least 60 but under 75 to do this.

## Retirement

Retirement means the time from when you start to take the benefits from your pension.

You can take your pension benefits from age 50 (going up to 55 by 2010). You don't have to stop working to do this.

The precise timing may vary between pension schemes, so check with your pension plan provider.

### This guide is *not* for you if:

You're getting a pension from an occupational salary-related (final salary) pension scheme. This is because your pension income is worked out differently. Speak to your pension scheme administrators to find out more.

## Key points

- A lifetime annuity pays you a pension income for life.
- You don't have to buy one from your pension provider and you don't have to buy one when you reach retirement age.
- You may be able to increase your pension income if you shop around – see page 8.
- If you're getting a pension from an occupational defined contribution (money purchase) pension, your choices are set out on page 8.

# Choosing a lifetime annuity

**There are several things to think about to ensure you get the right pension income for you. Here we cover the following:**

- What is a lifetime annuity?
- Who can buy one?
- Why is it important when you take your annuity?
- How your pension income is worked out
- Choosing the right annuity
- Shopping around for the best deal

We also cover some other retirement options that you can take.

## What is a lifetime annuity?

A lifetime annuity converts your pension fund into pension income and will be paid to you for the rest of your life.

Your pension income is subject to tax, just like your normal salary.

## Who can buy one?

You can buy a lifetime annuity if you have one of the following types of pension:

- Personal pension
- Stakeholder pension
- Most Additional Voluntary Contribution (AVC) schemes
- Free-Standing Additional Voluntary Contribution (FSAVC) scheme
- Retirement annuity contract (RAC)
- Section 32 policy (buy-out bond)
- Occupational money purchase scheme

If you have contracted out of the additional State Pension, you must use that part of your pension fund to buy a **protected rights annuity**.

You have the same options as with your other pension funds except that you must buy a joint-life annuity paying a 50% spouse's pension if you are married or have a civil partner.

## Why is it important when you take your annuity?

If you have a with-profits pension fund you are asked to state an age at which you would like to retire. Usually people choose age 60 or 65. This age will appear on your pension policy documents as your expected retirement date.

With-profits funds will usually only allow retirement benefits to be taken at set dates in the life of the policy, such as your selected retirement date.

Some insurance companies may reduce your fund at retirement by making a **market value reduction or other charge** if you don't buy an annuity on this date. Make sure you check what date you have said you want to retire at and whether you will be penalised if you don't take your annuity then.

## How your pension income is worked out

The amount of pension income you will get depends on several factors, such as:

- the **amount of money left in your fund** if you choose to take a tax-free lump sum;
- the **annuity rate** offered by the insurance company;
- the **type of annuity** you decide to buy – see page 6;
- your **sex** (women will get a lower income because they are expected to live longer);
- your **age** (you will get a lower income the younger you are); and
- your **health or lifestyle** (you may get a higher income if you are a smoker, have high cholesterol or are in poor health. Where you live or your occupation can also make a difference).

## Choosing the right annuity

There are different types to suit your needs and circumstances, but the basic types are:

- **single life** – an annuity just for you if either you don't have a spouse or partner, or they have their own pension arrangements; and
- **joint life** – an annuity that will pay out to you and then your spouse or partner after your death (normally at a reduced rate).

You can also choose whether you want your single- or joint-life annuity to be **level** or **escalating**.

### A level annuity

This pays out the same pension income throughout your life. In other words it does not increase in line with inflation.

You will get more money to start with than you would from an escalating annuity, but it will buy you less in the future because of inflation.

### An escalating annuity

This will normally start at a lower rate than a level annuity and will gradually build up.

With an escalating annuity there are two main choices:

- **fixed-rate** - your income increases each year by an agreed fixed rate (for example 3% or 5%); and

- **RPI-linked** - your income is adjusted each year to reflect changes in the Retail Prices Index (RPI), which is the most common measure of inflation used by the government (ie the cost of living). The actual increase in your annuity will vary from year to year to match inflation, so the buying power of your pension will stay the same.

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**Although you will initially get less money with an escalating annuity than with a level annuity, it will increase each year. If inflation stays low, it can take up to 20 years or more for an escalating annuity linked to the RPI to pay out as much as a level annuity. But if you don't have an escalating annuity, even low levels of inflation can, over time, significantly reduce your standard of living.**

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You can also add some options to your lifetime annuity.

### A guarantee period

You can **guarantee** your lifetime annuity for a specific number of years (usually five or ten) so it continues to pay the income for that time even if you die before then. The income is then usually paid to your partner or to another dependant.

## Annuity protection lump-sum death benefit

This is a way of ensuring that if you die before the age of 75, your annuity doesn't stop. A lump sum equivalent to the pension fund you used to buy the annuity, minus the income you've already been paid, will be paid to your estate or beneficiaries. There will be an income tax charge, and there may also be an inheritance tax charge.

## Enhanced and impaired-life annuities

Some companies offer **impaired-life** annuities that pay a higher than normal income if you have health problems that threaten to reduce your lifespan.

You might be able to get an **enhanced annuity** if you are overweight or smoke regularly. Some companies offer higher rates to people who have followed certain occupations or people who live in certain parts of the country.

**Always check whether you may be eligible for either of these options.**

## Key points

- Taking a tax-free lump sum is attractive, but it does reduce your pension income.
  - Find out whether you'll be penalised if you don't buy an annuity at your stated retirement age.
  - Check whether you could get a better income because of your health, lifestyle, occupation or where you live
  - Consider whether you need to provide a pension for your partner on your death.
  - Consider whether you want your pension income to keep pace with inflation.
  - Think very carefully about the type of annuity you want, as you can't change your mind once you've bought it.
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## Shopping around for the best deal

Your pension provider should give you an estimate of the value of your fund at least six weeks before you plan to retire.

They should also tell you how much income the lifetime annuity they offer would give you.

You don't have to buy your annuity from your pension provider. You can shop around. This is known as an **open market option**.

However, always check what your provider is offering you first, as they may offer a **guaranteed annuity rate** written into the policy which may be higher than the rates offered in the open market.

Lifetime annuity quotes are usually fixed for between 7 and 28 days. The company will tell you if you have the right to change your mind and cancel the contract, and if so, how to cancel.

Not all companies will deal with you direct so it may be advisable to consult a **whole-of-market adviser**, who should be able to look at all the annuity rates on offer. To find a financial adviser see *Useful contacts*.

The insurance company usually pays commission to the adviser, so getting advice should not affect the amount you pay for the annuity. But ask whether you have to pay the adviser any added charges.

## Key points

- Always check what your provider is offering first and use this as a basis to shop around.
- You may be able to increase your income by as much as a third by shopping around.
- Use our unique online annuity tables at **Compare products** to compare features and costs of lifetime annuities based on the actual amount in your pension fund – see *Useful contacts*.

## Occupational defined contribution schemes

The rules for these schemes are different to those for personal and stakeholder pensions. The trustees of the scheme may buy an annuity for you, but you do have the right to shop around if you want.

For more information see the Pension Regulator's factsheet **Your retirement choices – money purchase benefits in occupational pension schemes** – see *Useful contacts*.

## Other retirement choices

If you don't want any of the types of annuity mentioned earlier, or if you decide to delay buying a lifetime annuity, then you may want to consider a few other options.

Some are only suitable if you have a large pension fund or other sources of income, and you are comfortable taking some risk with your fund. For advice based on your own circumstances, talk to a professional adviser.

After taking a tax-free lump sum, you may have the following options:

- **Investment-linked lifetime annuity**

This relies on stockmarket performance and therefore your income could go down as well as up.

- **Phased retirement**

You can split your pension fund up and buy annuities at different times.

- **Unsecured pension using income withdrawal or short-term annuities**

This lets you draw an income from your pension fund while leaving it invested, but will stop when you reach 75. By that time you must secure an income, which usually means buying an annuity.

- **Hybrid products**

These new products pay a regular income and offer guarantees of either investment growth or the amount of pension fund you will have left to buy an annuity later on. They vary in what they're called, the guarantees they offer, and the charges they make to cover the cost of the guarantees. You generally have to give up some investment growth potential to pay for the guarantees.

On your 75th birthday, if you haven't bought an annuity, another option is to use an alternatively secured pension. This works in a similar way to unsecured pensions but has different limits and rules.

Alternatively secured pensions are not suitable for everybody and it is important that you take professional advice if you are thinking of taking this option. Inheritance tax and other significant tax charges may apply to any leftover funds on your death.

For more information, get a copy of our **Retirement options** guide – see *Useful contacts*.

# Key things to think about

## Getting financial advice

Firms selling pensions and annuities must be regulated by us. This means they have to meet certain standards which we monitor, and we can take action if they don't. Advertisements, product brochures and other promotions produced by firms we regulate must be clear, fair and not misleading.

You can check if a firm is regulated and report any misleading promotions to us by phone or online – see *Useful contacts*.

You may also be able to use the Financial Ombudsman Service if things go wrong, or the Financial Services Compensation Scheme if your adviser or provider stops trading – see page 16.

## Information you will get

You will usually get a **Key Features Document** describing the main aspects of an annuity, such as its aims and risks. Make sure you read and understand this information and ask questions if there's anything you're unsure about.

With annuities, you will usually get an illustration showing the amount of income you would get (depending on the size of your pension fund), your personal details and the current annuity rates. The figures are shown after deducting any lump sum you have chosen to take as tax-free cash.

For more information get a copy of our **Retirement options** guide – see *Useful contacts*.

## When shopping around for an annuity

### Check

the value of your pension fund and how much pension income your provider's annuity would give you. Use this to compare rates when you shop around. Your provider should give you an estimate at least six weeks before you plan to retire.

### Check

whether you'll lose any benefits if you buy from elsewhere instead of taking up your provider's offer, such as an option to buy a lifetime annuity at a guaranteed rate. These are very valuable, as current annuity rates on the open market may be much lower.

### Check

whether your provider will make a charge if you buy an annuity from somewhere else. If so, make sure the estimate that they have given you includes these charges.

### Check

that you read the **Key Features Document** carefully, and ask questions if there's anything you're unsure about.

# Your questions answered

## Question

**How can I boost my pension income?**

### Answer

You can usually postpone converting your personal or stakeholder pension fund into pension income, in consultation with your pension provider, and continue contributing to your pension fund.

You can continue working and contributing to an occupational pension scheme only if the scheme rules allow – so check with your scheme administrators.

You can postpone taking your State pension and get either extra State pension or a one-off taxable lump sum. You stop paying National Insurance contributions, however, once you reach State Pension Age – currently 65 for men and 60 for women.

## Question

**Do I have to buy an annuity when I stop work?**

### Answer

No, you can postpone buying an annuity and you can continue paying into your pension fund (but possibly not if it's an occupational pension scheme).

If you do postpone, you may get a higher annuity because the money will have been invested for longer and you will be older. However, lifetime annuity rates can go down as well as up, so there are no guarantees that you will get a better rate if you postpone buying an annuity.

## Question

**I only have a small pension fund. Does this make a difference?**

### Answer

It may do. If the fund is worth £5,000 or less, you may find it hard to shop around or you may have to pay higher charges. Shopping around may be easier if you think you may be eligible for an impaired-life or enhanced annuity.

If the total of all your pension funds does not exceed £16,500 (in 2008/09, or £17,500 in 2009/10) you can take it all as a cash lump sum rather than taking an income. This is known as **commutation**. You must be aged 60 or over, but under 75, and you must do it within a 12-month period. One quarter of the lump sum will be tax free and the rest is taxed as income.

## Question

**What are my options if I have more than one personal pension?**

### Answer

You may be able to get a higher lifetime annuity if you combine them by transferring them all into one stakeholder or personal pension and then buying one annuity.

On the other hand, if you don't need the income right away, you could buy a lifetime annuity with one pension fund and leave the other(s) until later.

It really depends on the type of pensions you have, so you may want to get professional financial advice.

# Next steps

## Step 1

Go through the chart on the next page to help you decide what type of annuity would best suit you.

## Step 2

Get an estimate of the value of your pension fund, taking into account any charges. This estimate should be sent to you at least six weeks before your retirement date, but you can ask for it earlier so that you can start shopping around.

## Step 3

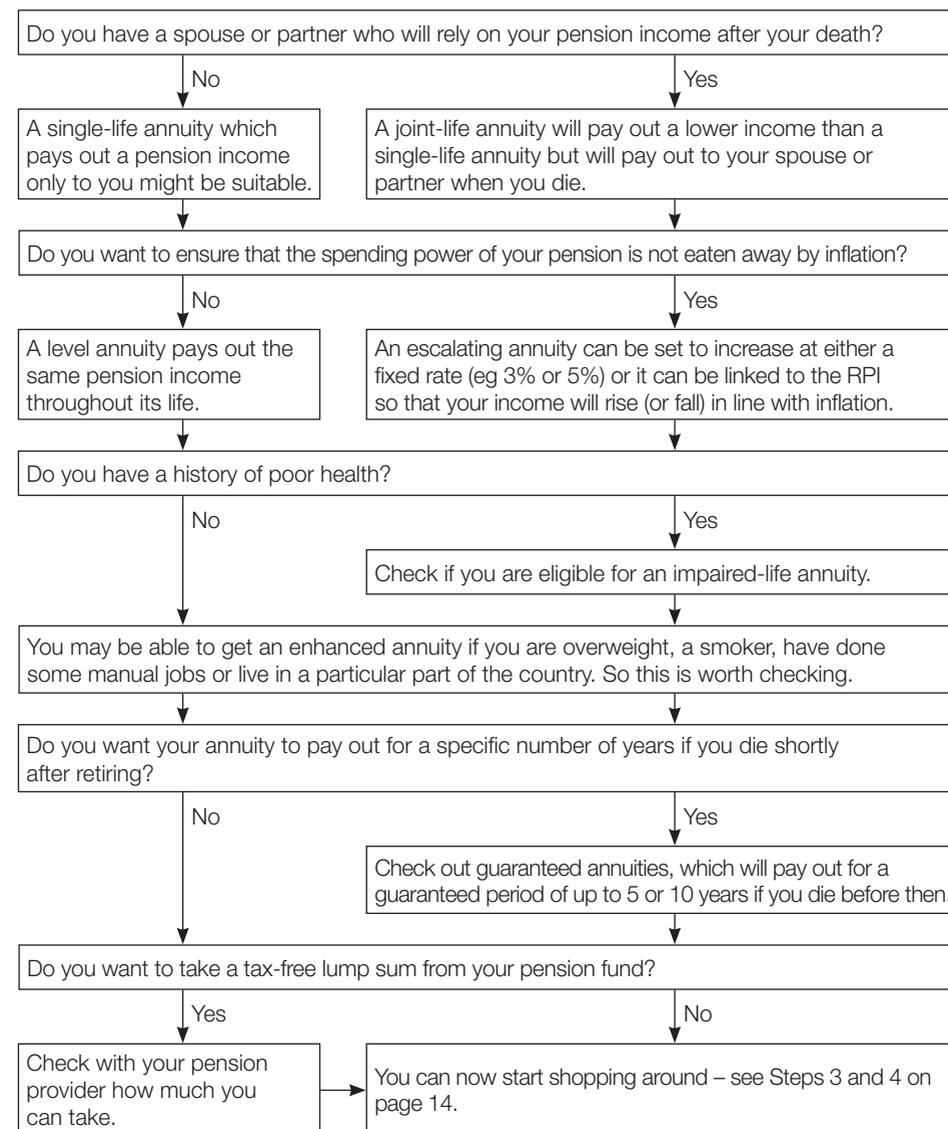
Check what your pension fund provider can offer on the type of annuity you want. Check whether they offer a guaranteed annuity rate.

## Step 4

Shop around and get quotes for the type of annuity you want from a range of providers. Use our annuity tables at **Compare products** to help you – see *Useful contacts*.

**Remember, if you need help, take advice from a professional financial adviser as they will be able to make recommendations based on your financial objectives and personal circumstances.**

## Use this chart to help you decide what type of annuity would best suit you



# If things go wrong

If you have a complaint about the advice you received when you bought your annuity or other retirement option, first take your complaint to your financial adviser or the company that advised you.

If you cannot resolve the problem with them, you may be able to use the Financial Ombudsman Service. See our **Making a complaint** guide for more information – see *Useful contacts*.

If a provider is unable to meet claims against it, the Financial Services Compensation Scheme may be able to help you. Get a copy of its guide **How we can help you** – see *Useful contacts*.

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# Jargon buster

## Some key words and phrases explained.

### Additional State pension

A pension paid on top of your basic State pension. It used to be called SERPS but is now called the State Second Pension. Self-employed people cannot build up an additional State pension.

### Alternatively secured pension

On your 75th birthday, a way of getting an income from your pension fund without buying an annuity. This income is taxable.

### Annuity rate

The amount of monthly income you get for your pension fund, which is dependent on several factors such as your age, sex, state of health and the type of annuity you want.

### AVCs – Additional Voluntary Contributions

A pension top-up policy for an occupational pension. You pay contributions into a scheme run by your employer to boost your main pension.

### Commutation

Taking your pension benefits as cash if they do not exceed a certain level. This level changes each tax year. This is sometimes known as 'triviality'.

### FSAVCs – Free-Standing Additional Voluntary Contributions

A pension top-up policy for an occupational pension, but separate from your employer's pension scheme and normally run by an insurance firm.

## Jargon buster

### Inflation

This happens when prices go up throughout an economy. The effect of inflation on your money means that it will buy less each year.

### Lifetime annuity

An investment that converts your pension fund into pension income that is paid to you for life. The income is taxable.

### Market value reduction

A reduction to your pension that could apply if you want to cash in your with-profits policy before or after its maturity date or other date(s) specified in the policy.

### Open market option

Your right to shop around and buy your annuity from the company offering the best deal for you.

### Retirement annuity contract (RAC)

An RAC is similar to a personal pension, but was sold before 1988 when personal pensions first became available.

### S32 policy (buy-out bond)

Used by members of occupational pension schemes when they leave service or the scheme is wound up. A way of securing scheme benefits in the name of the employee.

### Tax-free lump sum

An amount of cash set by HMRC which you can take at retirement free of tax. Individual pension schemes may have different rules on the amount of tax-free cash you can take.

### Whole-of-market adviser

An adviser who offers advice on products from the whole market.

## Useful contacts

Call rates may vary – check with your telephone provider for their charges.

To order other **MONEY**madeclear™ guides, check our Register, report misleading promotions or for general information

### Financial Services Authority (FSA)

Consumer Helpline: 0845 606 1234  
Minicom/Textphone: 08457 300 104  
[www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk)

Other **MONEY**madeclear™ guides

- **Getting financial advice**
- **Retiring soon**
- **Retirement options**
- **Making a complaint**

On the **MONEY**madeclear™ website you can find:

- **Compare products** tables to help you compare annuities, savings and investments; and
- a **Budget calculator** to help you work out your spending.

Go to [www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk) and click on **Useful tools**.

### Pension enquiries

#### The Pensions Advisory Service

0845 601 2923  
[www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk](http://www.pensionsadvisoryservice.org.uk)

An independent organisation providing help with pension and annuity queries.

#### The Pensions Regulator

0870 606 3636  
[www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk)

Factsheet: 'Your retirement choices – money purchase benefits in occupational pension schemes'.

## Useful contacts

### Pension information and advice

#### **DWP Pensions Information Order Line**

For booklets about State Pensions

0845 7313 233

Textphone: 0845 604 0210

[www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk)

#### **Future Pension Centre**

For a forecast of your State Pension

0845 3000 168

Textphone: 0845 3000 169

[www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk)

#### **The Pension Tracing Service**

(at The Pension Service)

To trace pensions you've lost track of

0845 600 2537

[www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk)

### **The Pension Service**

To find out about deferring your State Pension

Leaflet: Your State Pension Choice – Pension now or extra pension later:

A guide to State Pension Deferral (SPD 1).

0845 606 0265

[www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk](http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk)

### **The Pensions Ombudsman**

020 7834 9144

[www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk)

For details of your occupational pension scheme talk to your pensions administrator, pensions manager or pension trustees at work.

### Finding a financial adviser/planner

#### **IFA Promotion**

[www.unbiased.co.uk](http://www.unbiased.co.uk)

For a list of eight independent financial advisers in your area.

#### **Personal Finance Society**

020 8530 0852

[www.thepfs.org](http://www.thepfs.org)

To help you find up to six financial advisers in your area.

#### **Institute of Financial Planning**

0117 945 2470

[www.financialplanning.org.uk](http://www.financialplanning.org.uk)

Financial planners can help you to achieve your goals by planning your finances.

### Complaints and compensation

#### **Financial Ombudsman Service**

South Quay Plaza

183 Marsh Wall

London E14 9SR

0845 080 1800

[www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk)

#### **Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS)**

7th Floor, Lloyds Chambers

Portoken Street

London E1 8BN

020 7892 7300

[www.fscs.org.uk](http://www.fscs.org.uk)