

Life Well Spent

2024 report

An examination of major purchases in later life and their impact on overall happiness.



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Welcome to the Life Well Spent Report 2024



To better understand the relationship between happiness and major spending, each year SunLife asks more than 2,000 people over 50 to share:

- Attitudes to money and spending
- What big purchases they've made in later life
- The big purchases they'd like to make if money was no object
- How their spending has affected their happiness

The report covers [daily spending and financial concerns](#), [holidays](#), [happiness and our homes](#), [home improvements](#), [cash gifts](#), [debts](#), and [equity release](#).

With the cost of living still on everyone's minds, the findings are a window into the lives, concerns and dreams of people over 50. Read on to find out how spending affects our happiness in later life, who the happiest over 50s are, and what they spend their money on.

The Life Well Spent report is now in its third year. For information on any of SunLife's current reports or past editions, email pressoffice@sunlife.co.uk.

Report background

The Life Well Spent research was undertaken between May and June 2024. 2,063 online interviews were completed with people over 50. 38% of respondents are retired, and 26% are in full time employment. 69% own their own home.

The report at a glance



Happiness and retirement

41% of over 50s rate their happiness as 8 out of 10 or above – 3% more than in 2023 and 2022

45% would prefer to delay retirement to continue working, even if money was no object – up 6% since 2023

Daily spending

The high cost of living is still the most common financial concern among over 50s (**63%**), but overall financial concerns are down since 2023

71% say they're spending more on energy bills in 2024



Your home

22 years – the average length of time over 50s have lived in their homes in 2024

1 in 4 over 50s love their home but worry they might have to move

Home improvements

9 in 10 over 50s who've paid for a loft conversion and/or an extension say it's improved their happiness

A **new kitchen** is still top of the wish list for men, but women would prefer **new carpets and floors**



Holidays

£7,101 – the average estimated cost of a dream holiday for people over 50

The **USA** is still the top dream holiday destination

Cash gifts

£29,033 – the average amount gifted by over 50s to loved ones for a house deposit (down £583 since 2023)

The average amount gifted for early inheritance to see loved ones enjoy the money is **£21,524**



Debts

48% of over 50s have outstanding debts – 1% down since 2023

£67,478 – the average amount left to pay on the mortgage for all over 50s (£2,188 more than in 2023)

Equity release

£88,747 – the average amount of equity people would choose to release

42% of homeowners who are aware of equity release say they didn't know that equity release products can include a 'no-negative-equity' guarantee, which means you'll never owe more than your home is worth

57% of people who released equity spend it on home improvements

72% people who released equity say it made them happier



Key findings

Over 50s are still worried about the rising cost of living – but financial concerns are easing overall

The UK’s cost of living is still high, with 63% naming it as their biggest financial concern – although this is 10% less than in 2023. But the good news is, 17% of over 50s report being free from financial worries – up from 12% last year and 11% in 2022.

Like last year, people over 50 are especially worried about unexpected, sudden costs, and about running out of money during retirement.

In fact, money has risen from third to second place when we asked “what brings you most happiness?” But of those who name ‘money’ as one of the things that makes them happiest, almost two-thirds say the important thing is being debt free, or free of money worries – rather than simply having a lot of money.

Overall, people name family and friends, money and security, and their partner as the top reasons for a happy life.

And once again we see that certain big spends do improve happiness overall, despite the high cost. This is especially true when it comes to gifting an early inheritance to loved ones, or getting a loft conversion.

What makes people happy?

<p>“Being semi-retired and spending more time with my husband.”</p>	
<p>“Good Health and retirement. No stress or commitments.”</p>	
<p>“My grandchildren having room to grow up safely, the opportunity to help my children to take their next steps and not being tied to a house that isn’t right for us anymore.”</p>	
<p>“Simple pleasures like coffee at a riverside.”</p>	
<p>“Having enough money to be comfortable.”</p>	
<p>“Having BBQs in the garden on a sunny day.”</p>	
<p>“My life in general. I have everything I need. Financially we are OK. All the bills are paid. We have never been in debt.”</p>	

How do the happiest over 50s spend?

According to our 2024 findings, the happiest over 50s:

- Are aged over 70
- Are retired
- Are grandparents
- Have a household income above £40,000
- Live in their homes longer and have undertaken renovations
- Have smaller outstanding mortgages
- Go on holiday more often
- Are more likely to give a cash gift to loved ones

Supporting family matters most

Family is still the top thing that makes people over 50 the happiest. So it's no surprise that 23% worry about how their children and grandchildren are managing financially – especially among women over 50.

What's more, gifting cash to loved ones makes the over 50s happier – whether it's as an early inheritance, a special gift, or to help with the arrival of a new baby.

But while leaving an inheritance – either while they're still here, or when they're gone – is still a desire for most, 31% would prefer to spend their money enjoying retirement.

Very few know all the facts about equity release

For some, [equity release](#) can make big purchases in later life possible.

Almost 3 in 4 people who have released equity say it made them happier, with the most popular use of the money going towards home improvements. Others used it to supplement their income, while others spent it on holidays or gave their loved ones some financial support.

But only 6% of over 50s know all the facts, and [misconceptions about equity release](#) are still common. So there's still a way to go when it comes to awareness about all the options available.

Happiness after 50

They're called our 'golden years' for a reason, but how much happier are we in later life?

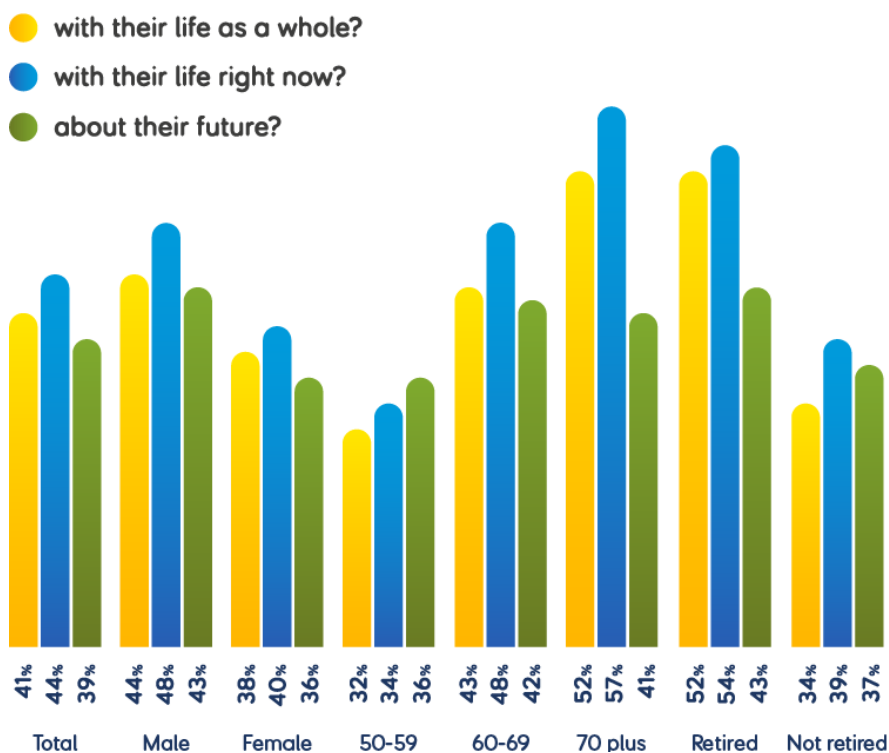


Happiness rises with age

When asked over 50s to rate “how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays” out of 10, a decisive 72% answered 6 or above (+3% from 2023). In fact, 41% rated their life satisfaction an 8, 9 or 10 (+3% since 2023).

Happiness appears to rise both with age and upon retirement, with 52% of over 70s (+1% from 2023) and 52% of retirees (+3% from 2023) scoring 8 or higher for overall life satisfaction.

Which over 50s are happiest...



Similar results can be seen when asked “how happy did you feel yesterday?”, with 57% of over 70s reporting high happiness (+2% from 2023).

Looking forward, 39% of over 50s feel very positive about their future (+4% since 2023), and only 16% (-3%) rated their outlook between 1 and 4 out of 10. Again, the over 70s and retirees showed the most optimism, with 41% and 43% respectively feeling very happy about the future.

The happiest region is Wales, where 53% feel very happy in their lives overall. The least happy regions are East Anglia and Northern Ireland, where only 35% feel the same.

What brings the most happiness?

When asked what three things make them happiest in life, the most popular answer is family and friends (91%). Second is money/security (17%), and third is our partners (15%). Joint fourth at 14% is our health and our pets.

But, like last year, it isn't having lots of money that makes people happy. It's financial security and being free from money worries. As one respondent said, it's about “having enough money to be comfortable.”

What makes you happiest?



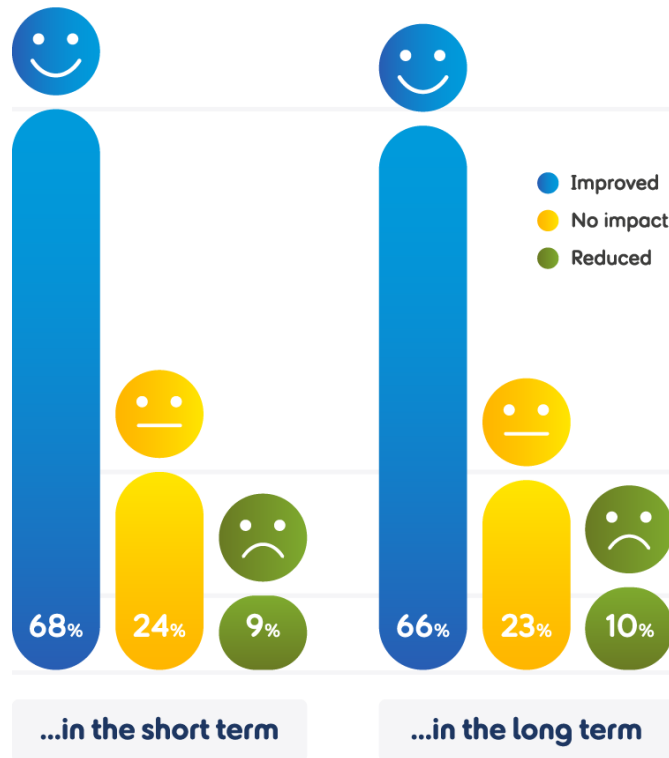
Travel (mentioned by 11% of respondents), hobbies (9%), nature (7%) and sunshine (7%) all made it into the top 10. And like last year, many over 50s reported spending time in their gardens as bringing them the most happiness.

Good food and drink just missed out on the top 10 in 11th place, with cheese, chocolate, beer and biscuits all getting a mention.

Does retirement make us happier?

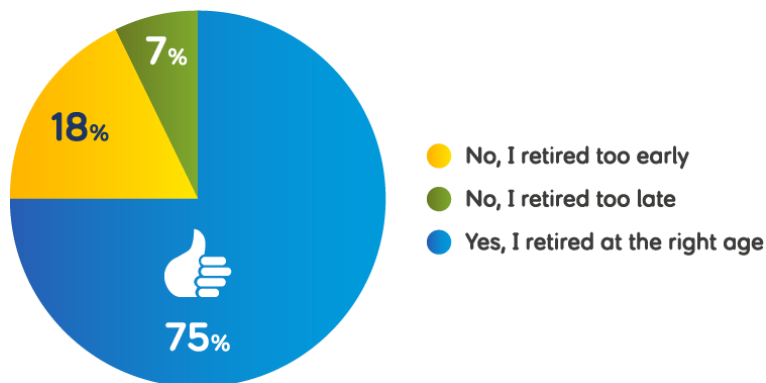
Overall, retiring improves people’s happiness in both the long term (66% – the same as in 2023) and short term (68% – up 1% since 2023). Like last year, only around 1 in 10 feel less happy since retiring.

How retirement affects happiness in over 50s who are retired...



3 in 4 feel confident they retired at the right age, rising to 84% for the happiest people over 50. But 18% feel they retired too early – up 4% since 2023. One reason for this could be the higher cost of living, which is continuing to impact retirement funds. And over 1 in 4 (27%) of retirees only have a State Pension.

Did you retire at the right age?



Overall, those who've retired report better physical health, having more time to do what they want, and spending time with loved ones.

But others report feeling isolated, lonely or bored, missing work and their colleagues, and not having as much money coming in.

How has retirement made you happy?

"Having time to do the things you want when you want, not having to get up early to go to work. Spending more time with friends and family."



"When you are ill and literally forced to retire...as a workaholic...it is very painful...however after a couple of years you adjust and come to benefit from being able to just relax when you are ill."



"Being able to choose what and when I do things. Most of all not having to answer to anyone."



"I retired due to ill health. My health has improved a lot since retiring. I now have a lot more time to spend with family and friends, and to do hobbies and follow interests."

"Being able to visit friends and family whenever I wish and not missing special occasions."



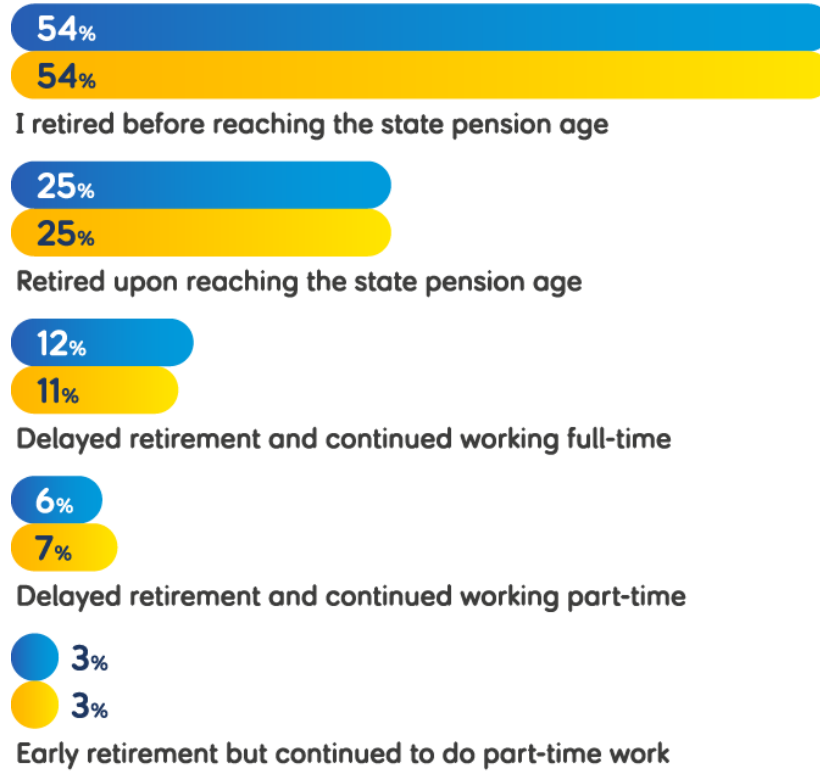
When do people retire?

The average retirement age is 61, which is also the average age retirees wish they'd retired at. Interestingly, this is the average retirement age for both the happiest and the least happy over 50s. Those yet to retire would like to do so at an average age of 66.

Over half of respondents who have retired did so before reaching the State Pension age (54%) – the same as in 2023. But 12% delayed their retirement to continue working full time (+1%), and 6% continued working part time (-1%).

What age did you retire?

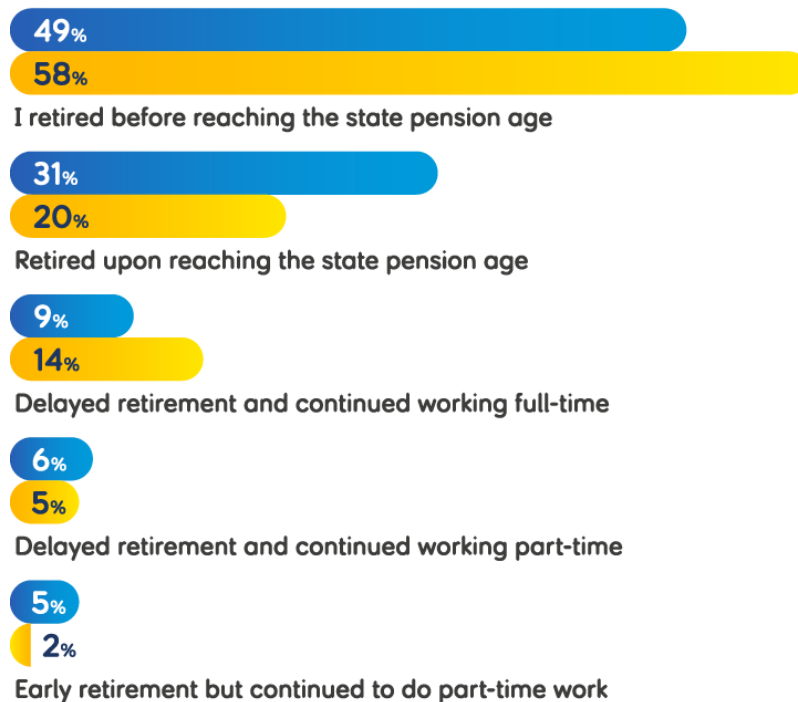
● 2024
● 2023



However, men retire earlier on average, with 58% retiring before State Pension age compared to 49% of women.

Retirement age: men and women

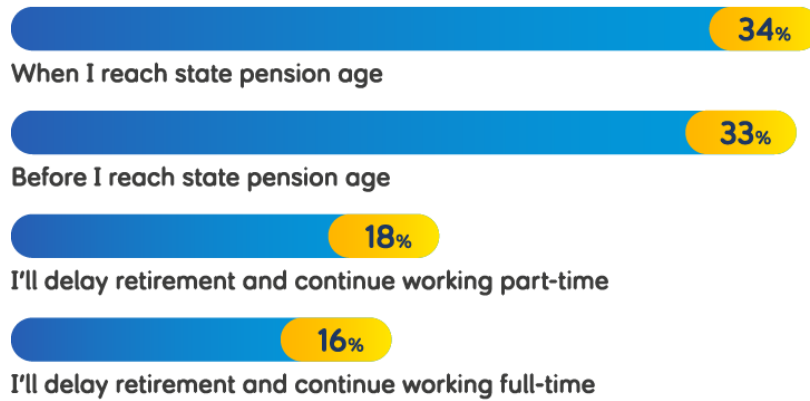
● Women
● Men



Most would like to delay retirement

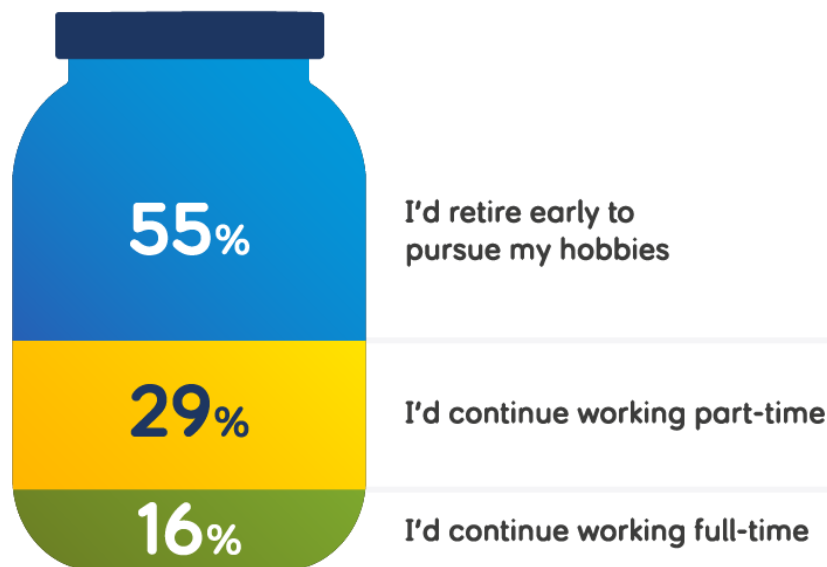
Of those yet to retire, 33% plan to retire before reaching the State Pension age – 9% more than last year. 34% (-3%) plan to retire at the State Pension age. And 34% again would like to delay retirement and continue working – 18% part time, and 16% full time.

When are you planning to retire?



Surprisingly, if money was no object, close to half (45%) of those yet to retire would still choose to continue working for as long as they can. That's a rise of 6% since 2023. 29% would continue part time, and 16% would continue full time. And 55% would retire early to pursue their hobbies if money wasn't an issue.

If money was no object...



Daily spending and financial concerns

How has daily spending for the over 50s changed in the last year, and what financial concerns do they have?



Half of over 50s are cutting back on takeaways, eating out and activities

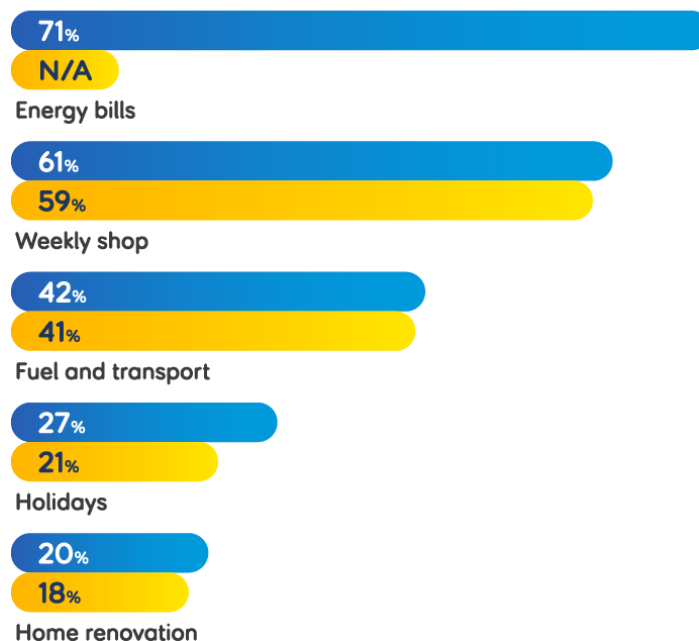
The research for this study was conducted in Spring and Summer 2024, while the cost-of-living crisis was still affecting many in the UK.

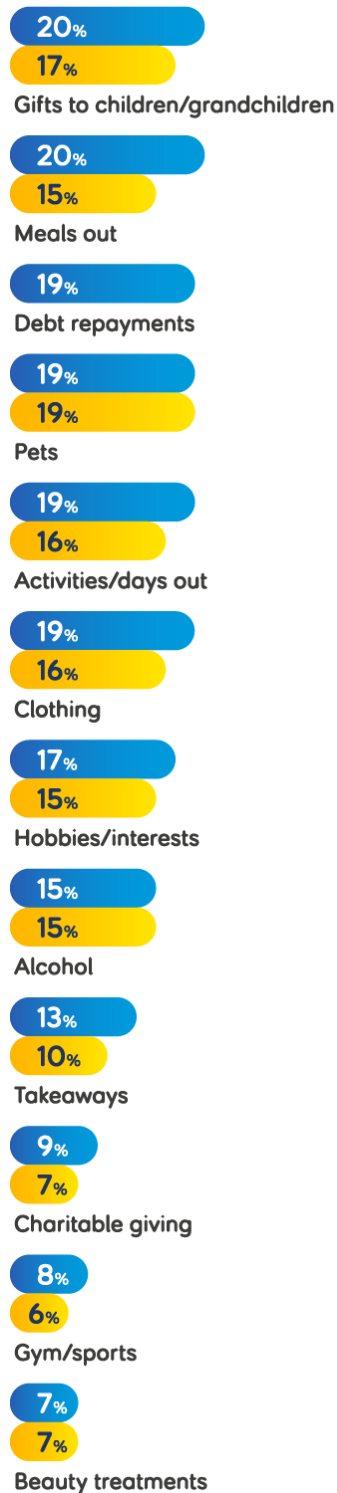
When asked how their spending has changed in the past year, 71% of over 50s say they're spending more on energy bills.

61% are spending more on the weekly shop (up 2% since 2023, and up 10% since 2022). While 42% are shelling out more on fuel and transport (up 1% since 2023 – but down 2% since 2022).

What are we spending more on?

● % Increase in spend in 2024 ● % Increase in spend in 2023





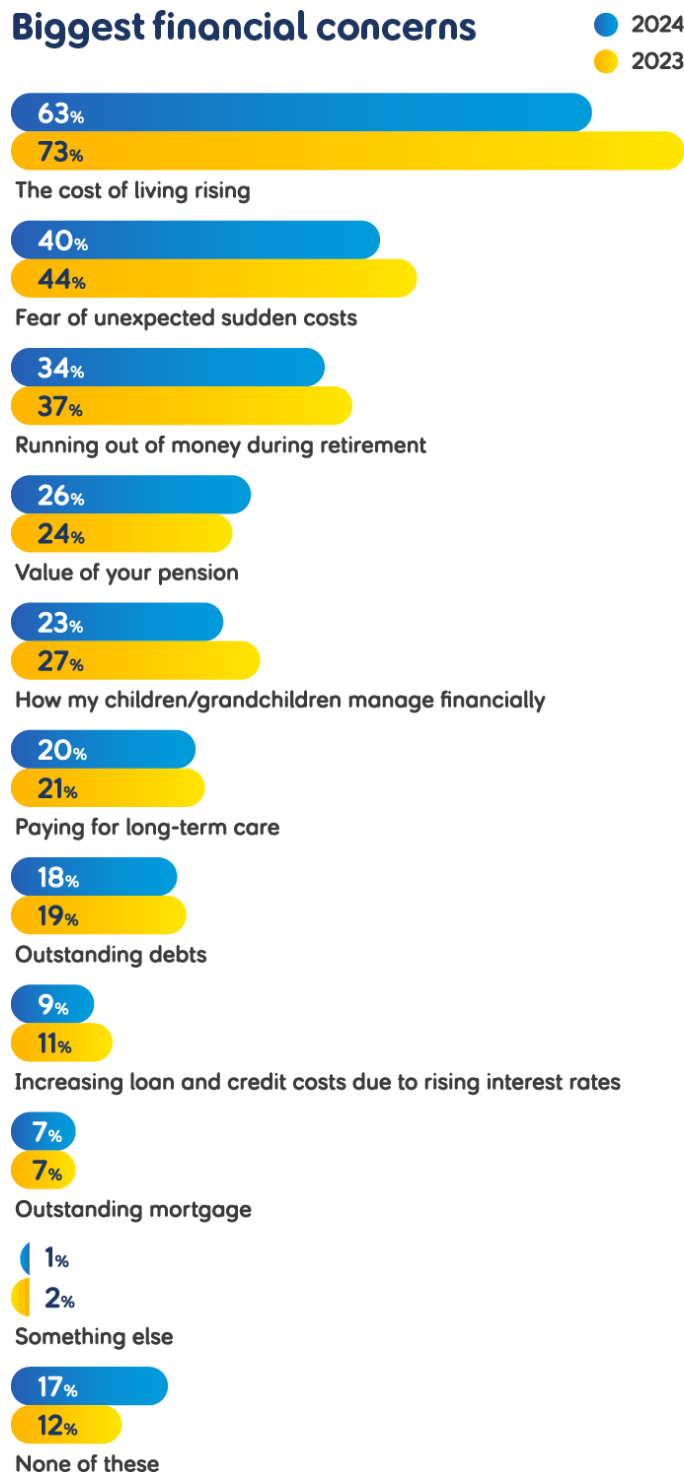
44% of over 50s say they've cut back on takeaways – that's 9% less than in 2023, and 3% less than in 2022. And exactly the same percentage say they've cut back on meals out – 8% less than in 2023, and 3% less than in 2022. While 38% have cut back on activities and days out – 9% less than in 2023, and 6% less than in 2022.

Like 2023 and 2022, the area where fewest are reducing their spending is on their pets. 66% of respondents report no change to their spending on pets (+3% since 2023 and +12% since 2022). And only 15% have decreased it (-2%).

What are the biggest money worries for over 50s?

Just like last year, the rising cost of living is the most common financial concern for people over 50. 63% listed it as their biggest money worry – 10% less than in 2023, and 12% less than in 2022. But the percentage of people worrying about these costs rises to 67% for 50-59 year olds.

At 40%, the next biggest financial concern is the fear of unexpected sudden costs (-4% since 2023). And running out of money during retirement came in third at 34% (-3% in 2023, and the same as in 2022).



One positive is that the number of people with no financial worries at all has risen to 17% – up 5% since 2023, and 6% since 2022. This rises to 23% for retirees, and 27% for the happiest over 50s. In fact, people are reporting less concern about *all* worries, except for the value of their pension.

Women are more worried than men when it comes to money

A higher percentage of women than men report being worried about each concern, except for paying for long-term care, where 20% of both women and men say it worries them. For men, this is a drop of 7% since 2023, and a drop of 10% since 2022. For women, it's a drop of 2% since 2023, and a drop of 9% since 2022.

Last year, more men than women were worried about the value of their pension (27% versus 22%). In 2024, slightly more women list this as a concern at 27%, versus 25% of men.

Despite this rise, the number of women concerned is still low, considering 33% of them report having no private or personal pension, meaning they're relying on a state pension alone. In comparison, just 20% of men report having no personal or private pensions.

One notable difference is worrying about the rising cost of living (68% of women versus 58% of men – although both are 10% down since 2023). Fear of unexpected costs is another (45% versus 35%), as is how children or grandchildren are managing financially (26% versus 19%).

And once again, men are 50% more likely to have no financial worries (22% – up 7% since 2023 and 2022) compared to women (11% – up 1% since 2023, and up 4% since 2022).

Like last year, retirees are less worried than non-retirees about things like the cost of living and unexpected costs. But they're more concerned than non-retirees about issues that will affect their loved ones, like how their children and grandchildren are managing financially (25% versus 21%), and paying for long-term care (26% versus 16%).

Regional worries

Certain differences can be seen between the worries of different regions across the UK.

At 74% (+2% since 2023), Northern Ireland is the region most concerned about the rising cost of living. In fact, this region is where fewest are free from financial worries (11% – down 3% since 2023).

London is the least worried about the rising cost of living at 56% (-17% since 2023). But the North East is the region most likely to be free from any financial concerns at all (24% – up 8%).

Despite this, 30% (+3%) of those in the North East are worried about how their children and grandchildren are coping, compared to the average of 20%.

And Scotland are most worried about running out of money during retirement – with 39% naming this as one of their biggest financial concerns, compared to the national average of 34%.

Happiness and the home

Our house is our haven – but what matters most to the over 50s when it comes to matters of the home?



How much are over 50s' homes worth?

It won't come as a shock to many that most [houses prices in the UK](#) have risen an awful lot in the last few decades.

In fact, on average this year's respondents say the value of their home has gone up 124% – from £148,948 to £334,106. That's over a period of 22 years, which is the average length of time they've lived in their current home.

However, it's worth noting that people seem to be undervaluing their homes. For example, if our respondents bought their house for £148,948 in 2002 and its value increased in line with the national average, it would in fact be worth £381,379 today.

A quarter (24%) of respondents have lived in their homes for over 30 years. And a third purchased their properties for less than £60,000.

The happiest over 50s are slightly (3%) more likely to live in their homes for more than 30 years.

What do over 50s love most about their home?

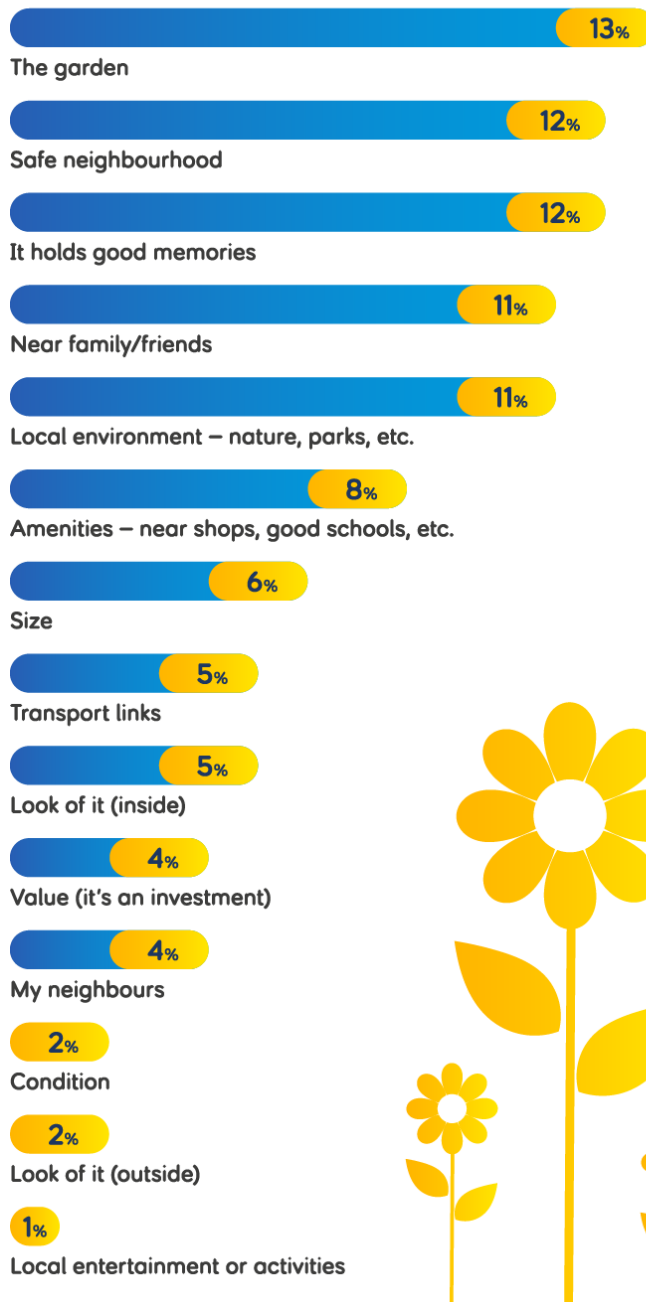
This year, we asked respondents what their favourite things about their homes are. And it turns out the monetary value of our property isn't what matters most to people over 50.

Instead, 13% say their garden is their most treasured part of the home. 12% say it's the safe neighbourhood, and 12% again say it's the good memories that the house holds.

Following closely at 11% is being close to family and friends, plus the local environment, such as parks and nature spots.

Only 4% of over 50s said the value of their house was their favourite thing about it.

What do you most love about your home?



What's uniquely sentimental about your home?

We also asked if there was anything uniquely sentimental about their homes – something that means the world to them, but that would be lost if they had to move house.

33% said yes (38% of women and 29% of men), with common examples being shared memories, a home that they (or their loved ones) built, and beloved pets being buried in the garden.

The Welsh are by far the most sentimental nation when it comes to our homes (44%), with the least being the Scots (29%).

What sentimental things about your home mean you wouldn't want to move house?

"All the hard work, blood sweat and tears. My husband has done everything here including a large extension at the back."



"We built it from scratch so I would want to take my home with me".

"Was my parents home until they passed away and I was raised here."



"All my pets are buried in the garden."

"Memory of children growing up."



"The views from our home, they are stunning."



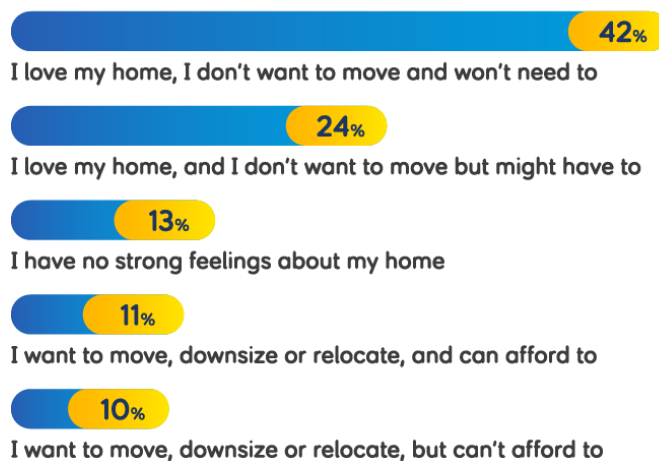
Would over 50s prefer to stay in their home, or move?

68% of over 50s say they love their home, with 42% saying they don't want to – or need to – move house. This rises to 58% for the happiest over 50s.

10% do want to move, downsize or relocate, but they can't afford to. This drops to just 3% for the happiest over 50s, and rises to 1 in 5 (21%) for the unhappiest.

And 1 in 4 over 50s (24%) say they may have to move even though they don't want to. For some home owners, [equity release](#) could be a way to stay in their own home.

How do you feel about your home?



Home improvements

Most of us dream about having the 'perfect' home. But can people over 50 afford to make home improvements while the cost of living is still so high?



How popular are home improvements with the over 50s?

Almost 3 in 4 (73%) over 50s have spent money doing up their house in the last five years, compared to 74% in 2023.

Once again, painting and decorating is the most popular home improvement, with 53% of over 50s picking up a paintbrush (-1% since 2023).

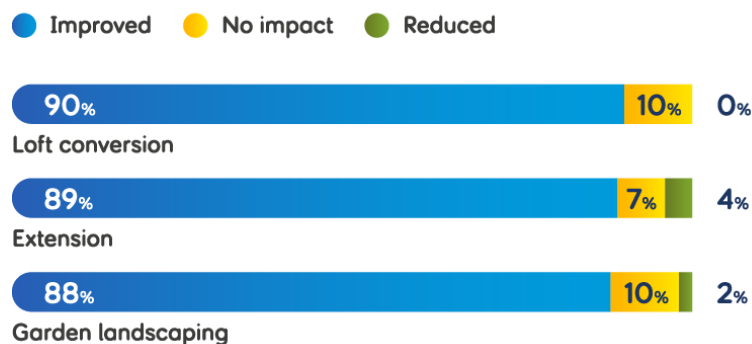
And just like last year and the year before, this is followed by new carpets or floors at 30% (also -1% since 2023), and garden landscaping at 23% (+1% since 2023).

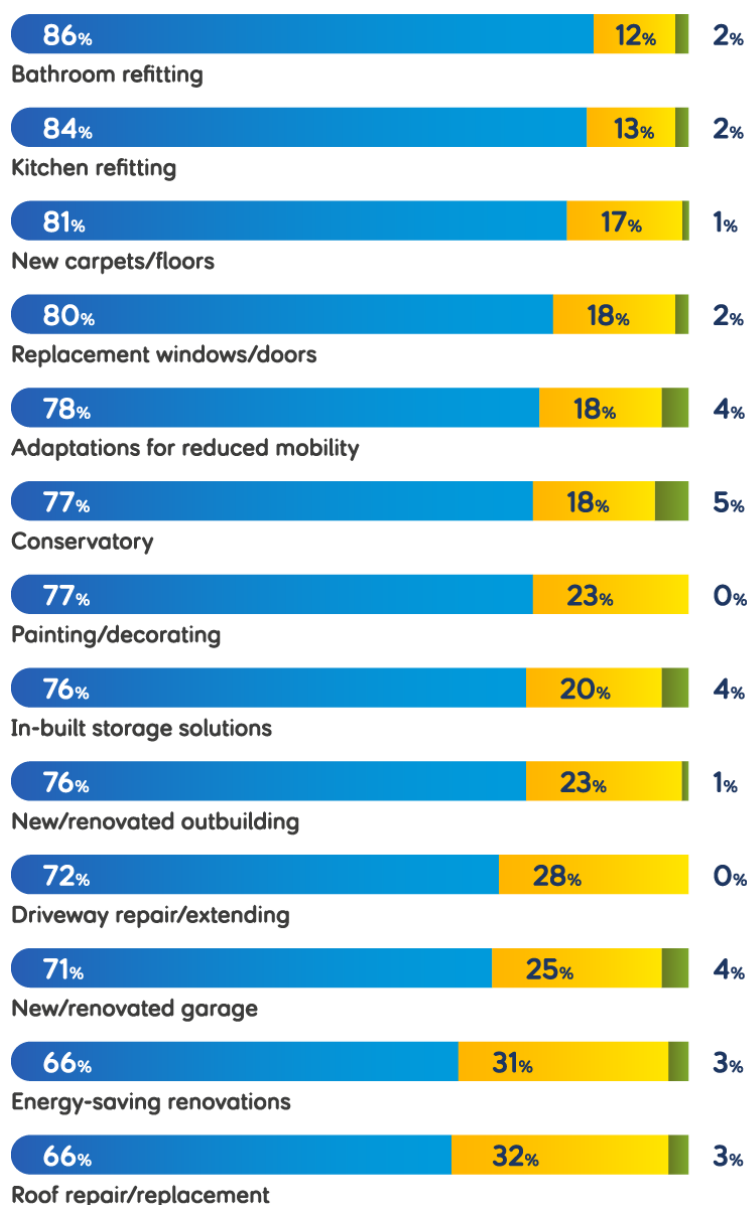
Over 1 in 4 (27%) of over 50s didn't spend anything on home renovations at all – +1% since 2023.

Home improvements make us happier

Just like in previous years, spending money on home improvements makes people over 50 happier. 86% of people who spent on home renovations say they felt happier as a result.

Did your home improvement make you happier?





The home renovation that increases happiness the most is a loft conversion, with 9 in 10 over 50s saying this made them happier. With a 1% drop since last year, a new extension came in a close second at 89%.

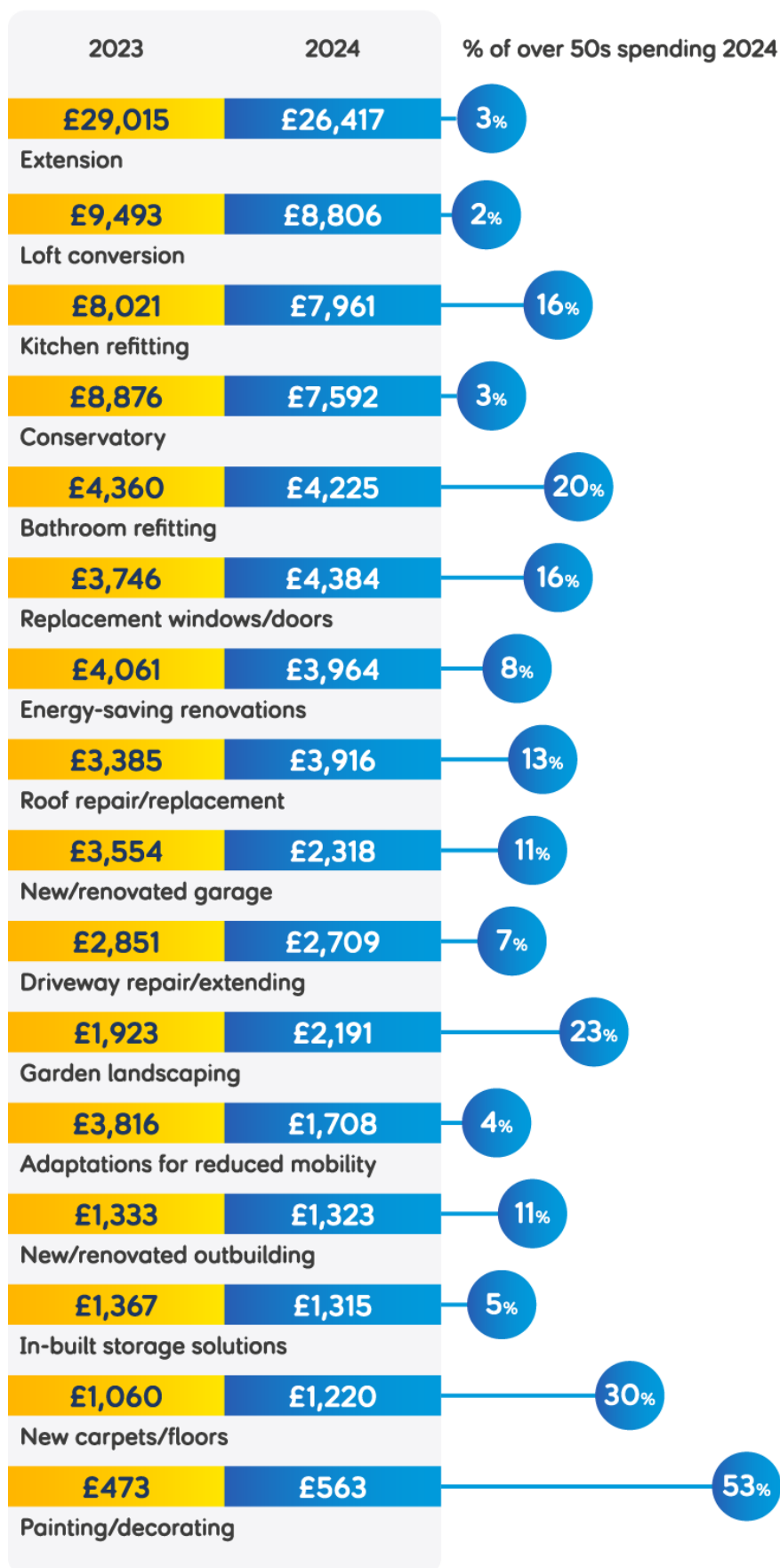
This is followed by garden landscaping at 88% (-1%). And at 86% (-2%), a new bathroom is now the fourth home improvement to bring the most joy – although it's closely followed by a new kitchen at 84% (-3%).

How much are the over 50s spending on home improvements?

The priciest home renovations are still extensions. The average spent on an extension is now £26,417 – £2,598 less than in 2023 (and over £5,500 less than in 2022).

Only 3% of over 50s have extended their home in the last five years (+1% since 2023). Whereas 53% (-1%) have spent money on painting and decorating, which costs just £563 by comparison (although this is £90 more than in 2023).

Average spend on home renovations by the over 50s

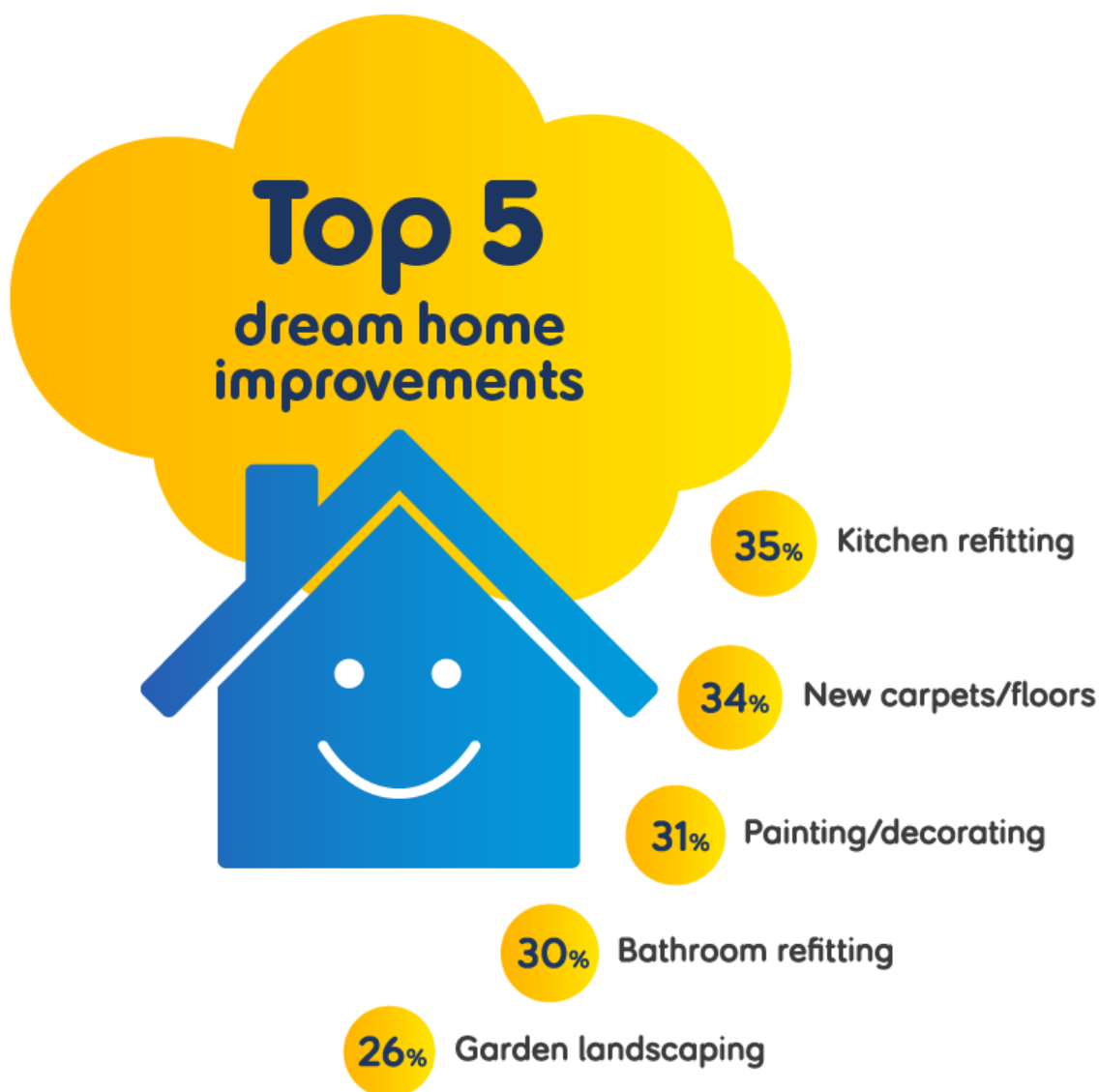


Dream home improvements

If money was no object, people over 50 would still most like to redo their kitchen. 35% name it as their dream renovation (-1% since 2023).

Also like last year, new carpets or floors are next on the 'dream renovations' list at 34% (-1%). Third is painting and decorating at 31% (-3%).

A new bathroom follows at 30% (-2%), then garden landscaping at 26% (-2%).



Most don't think they'll be able to afford dream home renovations

Most over 50s say they expect their dream home renovations to cost £28,665 on average – £6,758 less than in 2023.

But 62% say they may not ever be able to afford their dream home improvement (-4% since last year). In fact, only 17% are confident they'll be able to carry out their dream renovations at some point (+1%).



Out of all the age brackets, the over 70s have the most confidence that they can afford their dream renovations (20%). But the happiest over 50s are the most confident overall, with 27% saying they can afford it – compared to an average of just 9% for those who aren't as happy.

For some, [equity release](#) could be one way to make their dream home renovations possible.

Holidays after 50

Can people over 50 afford to go on holiday as often as they'd like? And where would they go if money was no object?



How often do over 50s go on holiday?

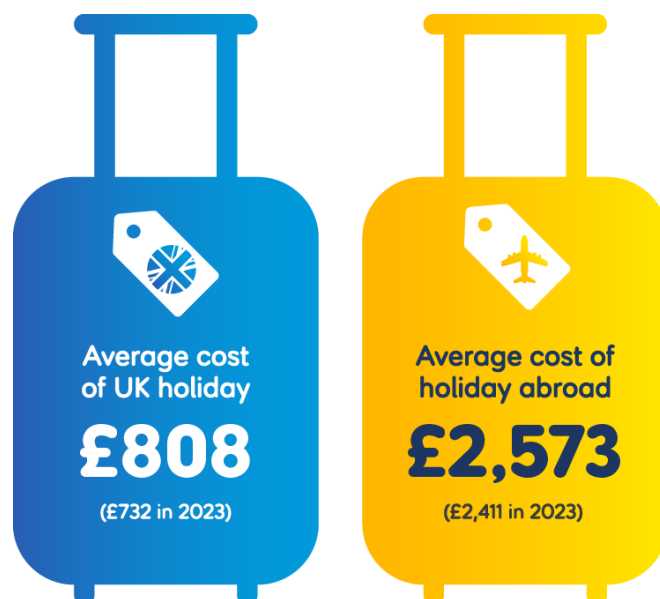
It's no surprise that those of us over 50 love a good holiday – in fact, it was the sixth highest mention in our [top three things that makes you happy](#).

Like last year, almost 9 in 10 (86%) people over 50 take at least one holiday abroad or in the UK every year – almost exactly the same as in 2023 and 2022. And once again, they go on one international break and two staycations on average.

When it comes to the happiest over 50s, they go on holidays abroad and in the UK more than those who say they're less happy – 90%, compared to an average of 71% for the less happy.

And 14% of over 50s don't go on holiday at all (+1% since 2023), although this drops to 10% for the happiest over 50s.

How much do over 50s spend on holidays?



Holidays abroad

On average, people over 50 spend £2,573 on holidays abroad – that’s £162 more than in 2023, and almost exactly the same as in 2022.

But the happiest over 50s spend £2,943 – £134 more than last year. And retirees are spending more than people who’ve yet to retire, at £2,673 versus £2,512.

There is some regional variation in the amount spent on holidays, with the Welsh topping the list with an average spend of £2,944. But just across the border, the South West of England spend the least on holidays abroad, an average of £2,083.

Holidays in the UK

When it comes to holidays in the UK, over 50s are spending more than last year. A staycation sets them back £808 on average (+£76 since 2023), and £812 for the happiest (+£6).

What do over 50s look for in a holiday?

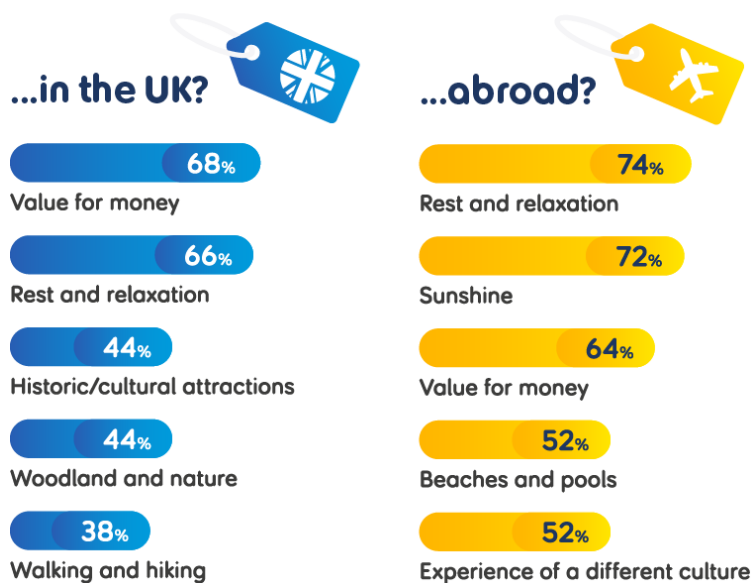
Rest and relaxation is what people over 50 are looking for most in a holiday abroad (74% – the same as in 2023).

Sunshine is more important than ever for destination holidays, with 72% of people saying it’s one of the most important things when on a trip abroad (+3% since 2023).

Like last year, women are slightly more likely to be looking for sun, with 76% naming it as a factor compared to 67% of men. Whereas men are more likely to look for walking and hiking than women, at 28% versus 23%.

And value for money is what matters most for staycations, with 68% of over 50s (+4%) saying it’s something they look for most in a UK holiday.

What do over 50s look for in a holiday...



There are some notable regional differences in what people look for most in a holiday abroad. 80% in Scotland and the North West list rest and relaxation as their top priority for holidays abroad, compared to 65% of Londoners.

60% of over 50s in Scotland prioritise authentic food and drink, compared just 38% of East Midlanders.

And those in Northern Ireland are twice as likely to look for exciting activities on a staycation, like theme parks or paragliding (14%, versus an average of 7% across all other regions).

Dream holiday destinations

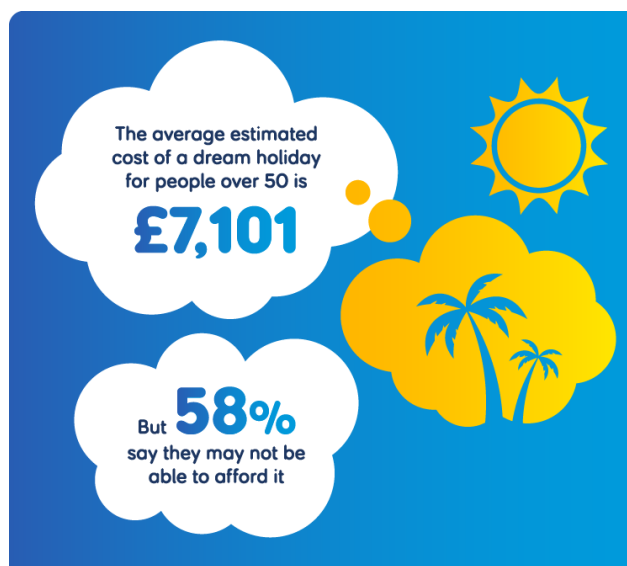
The top three dream holiday destinations for people over 50 haven't changed since last year (or since 2022). Here are the 10 places they'd most like to escape to...



Most aren't sure they'll ever be able to afford their dream holiday

Over 50s expect their dream holiday to cost £7,101 on average – down just £64 since 2023. While 31% plan to take their bucket list trip one day, 25% are hopeful but not confident they'll be able to afford it. Sadly, a third are not so optimistic, saying they don't think they'll ever be able to afford to go.

For some, equity release could be a way to release tax-free cash from their home's value, making their dream holiday possible – find out how at our dedicated equity release hub.



Cash gifts in later life

Can giving loved ones big financial gifts in later life make us happier?



A quarter of over 50s have given a significant cash gift

1 in 4 (25%) people over 50 have given substantial cash gifts to family members in the last five years (+2% since 2023), rising to 28% for the happiest over 50s, and 36% for the over 70s (+2%).

The average amount gifted is £20,021 – £4,043 more than in 2023. The most common reasons for cash gifts are:

1. As a special birthday/Christmas gift (27%)
2. To help them with the rising cost of living (23%)
3. For a deposit on a house (19%)
4. To give an early inheritance (17%)
5. To put towards a vehicle (17%)

Over 8 in 10 (83%) of gifters have given significant cash gifts to their children, 22% to their grandchildren (rising to 34% of over 70-year-olds), and 17% to someone else.

Of all the gifts that were given for a house deposit, 91% went to the respondent's children. For early inheritance to see them enjoy the money, 90% went to their children. And for fertility treatment, 86% went to their children.

Of the gifts that were given for a special birthday/Christmas gift, 40% went to the respondent's grandchildren. For college/tuition funds, 38% went to their grandchildren. And to help following the birth of a baby, 27% went to grandchildren.

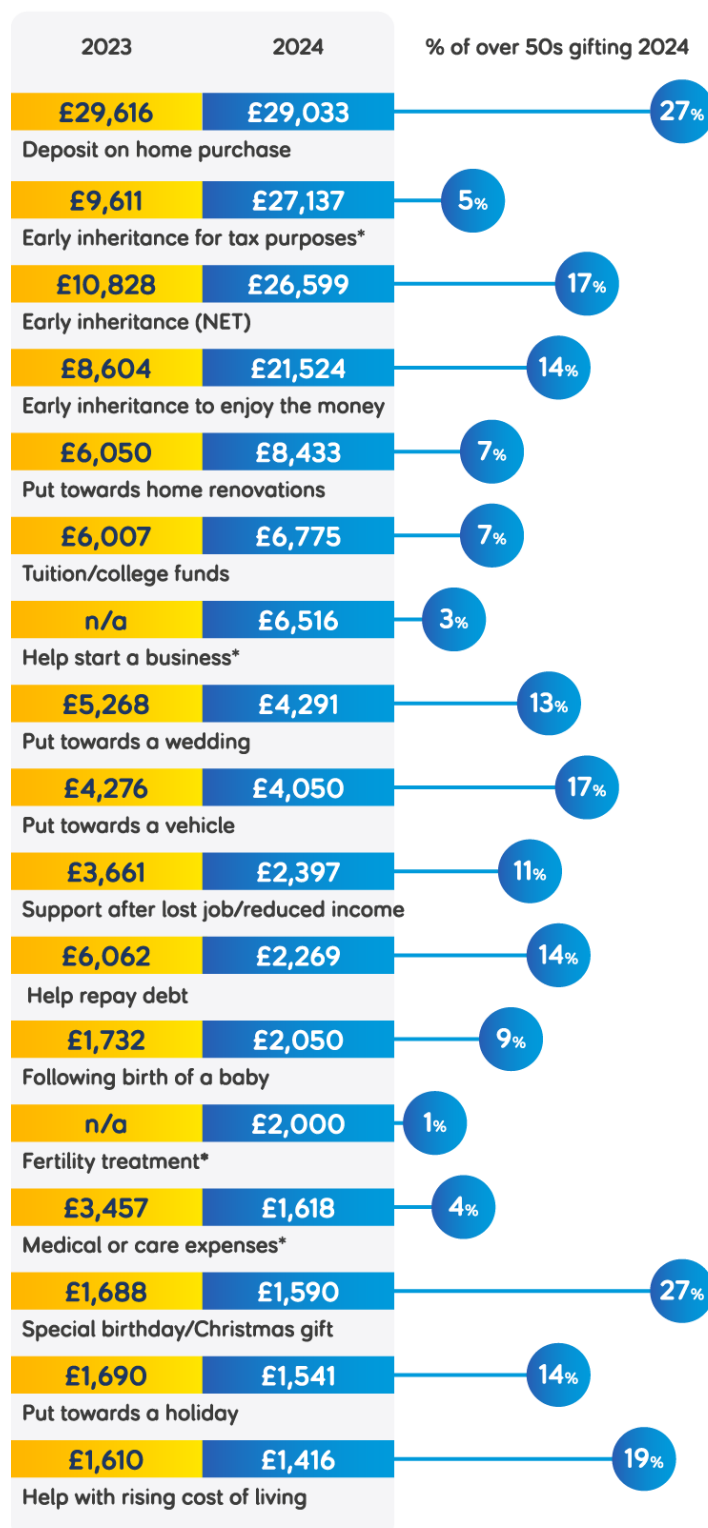
The biggest cash gifts are for house deposits

Once again, the biggest cash gifts given to loved ones were for house deposits. The average amount gifted for this reason by all people over 50 is £29,033 (£583 less than last year) – rising to £34,821 for 60 to 69-year-olds.

4.8% of all over 50s have given a cash gift towards a house deposit. This is up slightly from 4.7% in 2023, but down from 6.2% in 2022.

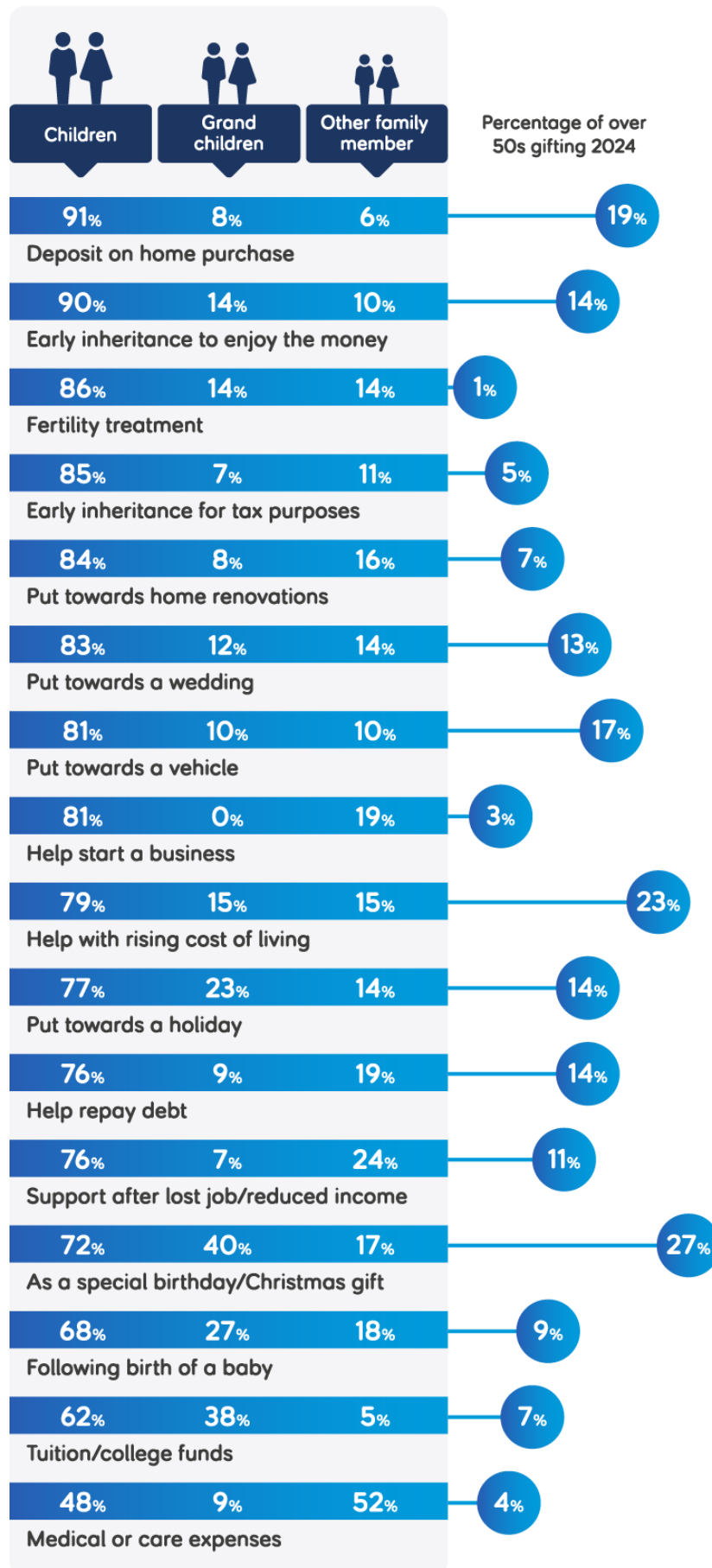
The next largest gifts are for early inheritance. On average, those who gifted early inheritance for tax purposes gave £27,137, and those who gifted it to see their loved ones enjoy the money gave £21,524. So the overall average amount gifted for early inheritance is £26,599 in 2024. 23% (+1%) of those giving cash gifts are doing so to help loved ones with the rising cost of living, with an average gift amount of £1,461 – down £149 since 2023.

Average amount gifted by the over 50s



*low base size

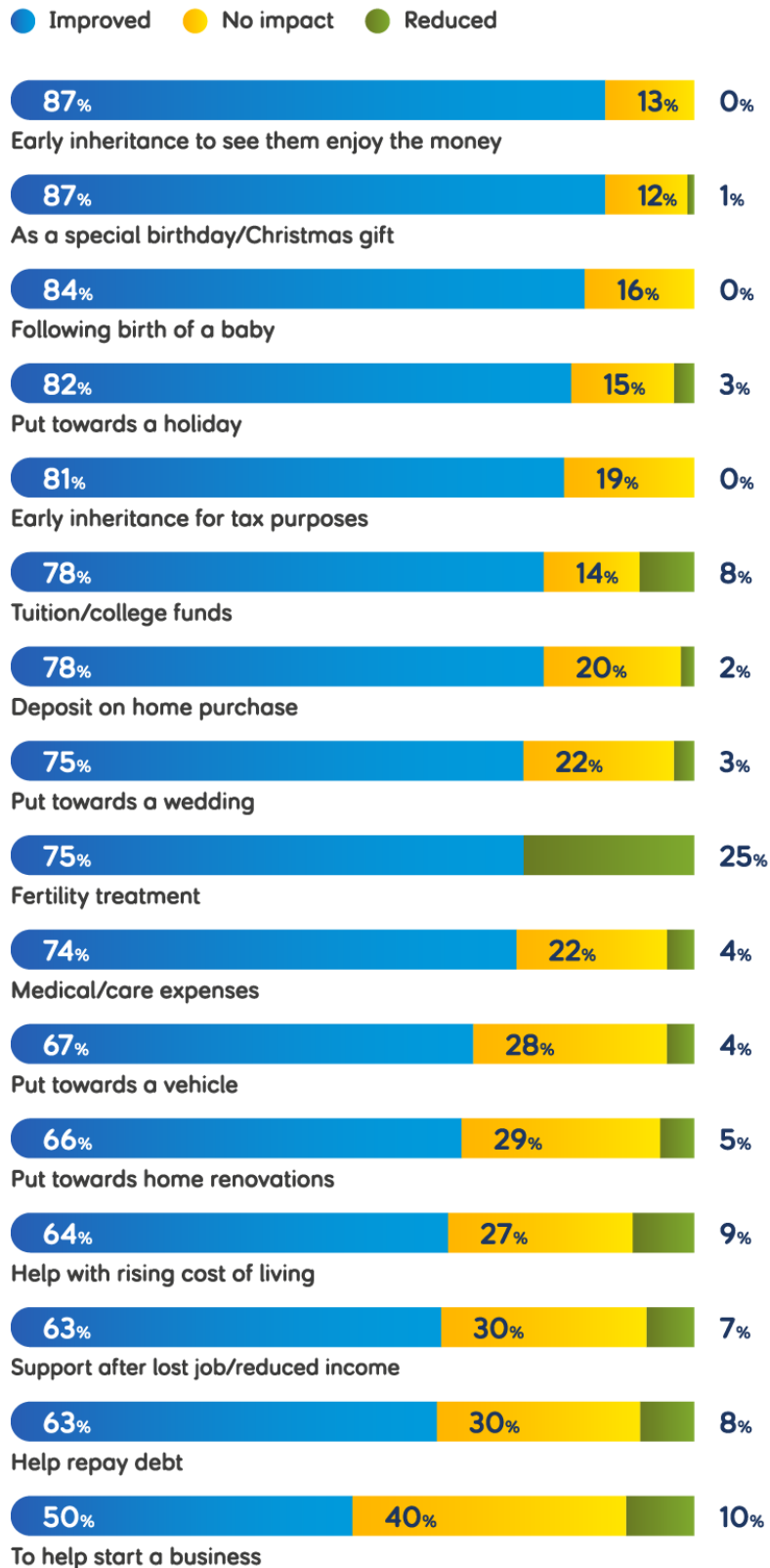
Who did you gift the money to?



Giving cash gifts to loved ones makes us happier

Almost 3 in 4 (78% – down 3% since 2023) who gave cash gifts to loved ones said doing so made them happier.

How did spending on cash gifts improve happiness?



Almost 9 in 10 (87% – up 3% since 2023) say gifting early inheritance to see their loved ones enjoy the money improved their happiness. And the same percentage (+5%) say gifting a special birthday or Christmas gift did the same.

In 2023, the happiest group were those who gifted money to help with medical care. This has dropped to 10th place in 2024, although 3 in 4 (74% – down 8%) still say this made them happier.

Gifting money to help a loved one start a business is the most likely to have no impact on/reduce happiness. But half still feel happy to have helped in this way.

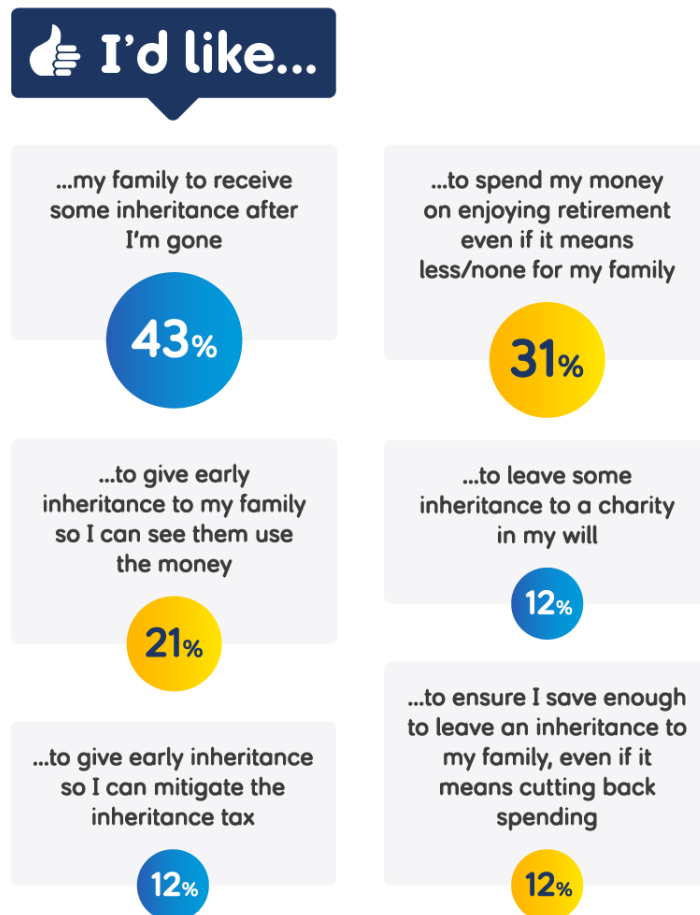
Most over 50s would like to leave an inheritance

The number of over 50s who'd like their family to receive some inheritance when they're gone has dropped from 49% in 2023, to 43% in 2024. 3 in 10 (31% – up 1% since 2023) would rather spend their money on enjoying retirement, even if it means there's nothing left to leave as inheritance.

However, 12% (+1%) would consider cutting back on spending in retirement to ensure they can leave an inheritance. And 21% want to give an early inheritance, so they can see their loved ones enjoy the cash – the same number as last year.

12% (+1%) plan to give early inheritance to mitigate inheritance tax. And 12% want to leave a legacy to a charity in their will (despite 31% having reduced their [charitable giving](#) in the last year).

Attitudes towards inheritance



Debt and happiness

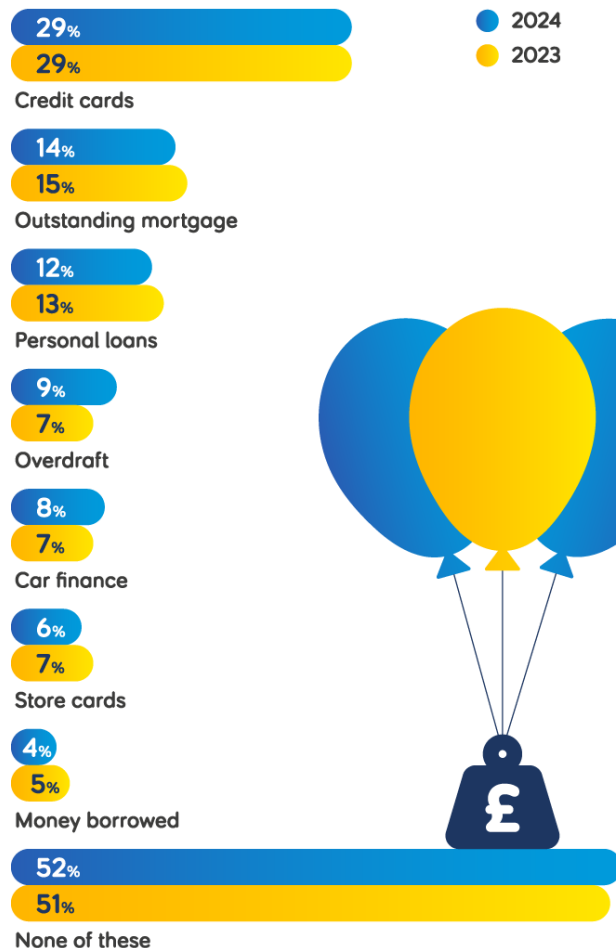
It's no surprise that debt can affect our happiness. But what debts are over 50s worried about the most?



What debts do over 50s have?

Around half (48%, down 1% since 2023) of people over 50 have outstanding debts – mostly credit cards, mortgages and personal loans.

What debts do the over 50s have?



34% of retirees have outstanding debts, compared to 56% of non-retirees. And perhaps unsurprisingly, the happiest over 50s are 9% less likely to be in debt than the overall average.

How much debt do over 50s have?

Over 50s yet to retire have higher outstanding debts than those already retired, across all categories.

Of those who are still paying off their mortgage, they still have £67,478 left to pay on average – £2,188 more than in 2023.

Average debt still left to pay	2024	2023
	Outstanding mortgage	£67,478
Car finance	£9,982	£11,341
Personal loans	£6,393	£6,171
Money borrowed	£4,178	£5,186
Credit cards	£3,887	£2,487
Overdraft	£1,377	£996
Store cards	£1,003	£930

5% of retirees still have outstanding mortgages (versus 20% of non-retired). They have an average outstanding amount of £63,644, compared to those not yet retired, who have an average of £68,096 outstanding.

29% of over 50s have outstanding credit card debt, the same proportion as in 2023. But the amount of credit card debt has risen across all over 50s, with an average of £3,887 owed – £1,400 more than last year.

How much debt are over 50s repaying every month?

Those with outstanding debt are spending a total of £724 per month on repayments on average. This represents 32% of total annual personal income (£26,876) or 25% of total annual household income (£35,165) being spent on debt repayment, and that's before tax or other deductions are made.

At £887 per month, paying off the mortgage is the biggest repayment on average, followed by car finance (£399 per month) and credit cards (£389 per month).

Retirees are repaying an average of £602 per month across their debts, 23% of their average annual household income of £31,064.

Monthly repayments left to pay 2024



What debts have over 50s paid off?

Almost 4 in 10 (39%) of over 50s have paid off some mid- to long-term debts in the last five years – that’s up 2% since 2023. But 17% (-1%) haven’t yet paid off any of their debts in full.

Which debts have you paid off in the last five years?



21% (+2%) of over 50s have paid off their mortgage in the past five years, rising to an average of 24% for retirees, and 26% for the happiest people.

On average, the over 50s who have paid off their mortgage in the last five years are 63, meaning they paid it off between ages 58 and 63. However, those who are [worried about their outstanding mortgage](#) are of a similar average age (58) – and

yet they consider paying off their mortgage to be a major concern. This suggests that interest rate hikes in the last couple of years may be impacting their future and outlook on life.

Paying off debt significantly improves happiness

Of those who haven't yet paid off their debts, just 57% think it would make them happier to do so, just 3% more than last year. 40% think it would have no impact on their happiness – 3% less than last year – and 4% think paying everything off would reduce their happiness.

But in reality, most people over 50 who've paid off their debts do feel happier as a result (83% – 2% down since 2023), including 51% (-4%) who say they feel significantly happier.

How would/did paying off your debts affect your happiness?



Equity release awareness and misconceptions

Equity release can make life-changing spends possible, such as dream [holidays](#), [renovations](#), [gifts to family](#), or [paying off debts](#). But many people don't know the ins and outs of equity release today.

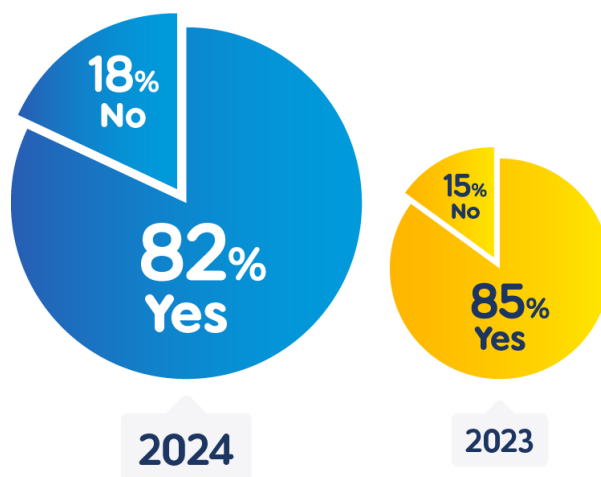


Are the over 50s aware of equity release?

[Equity release](#) is a way to get tax-free cash from the value that's tied up in your house. The most common type of equity release, a lifetime mortgage, is a loan that's secured against your home. This is repaid when you die or move into permanent care.

Releasing equity could enable you to take that dream holiday or give your loved ones an early inheritance – plus much more.

Are you aware of equity release?



When asked if they are aware of what equity release is, 82% of people over 50 say yes – 3% less than last year. And awareness rises to 91% among retirees, but this is still 4% less than in 2023.

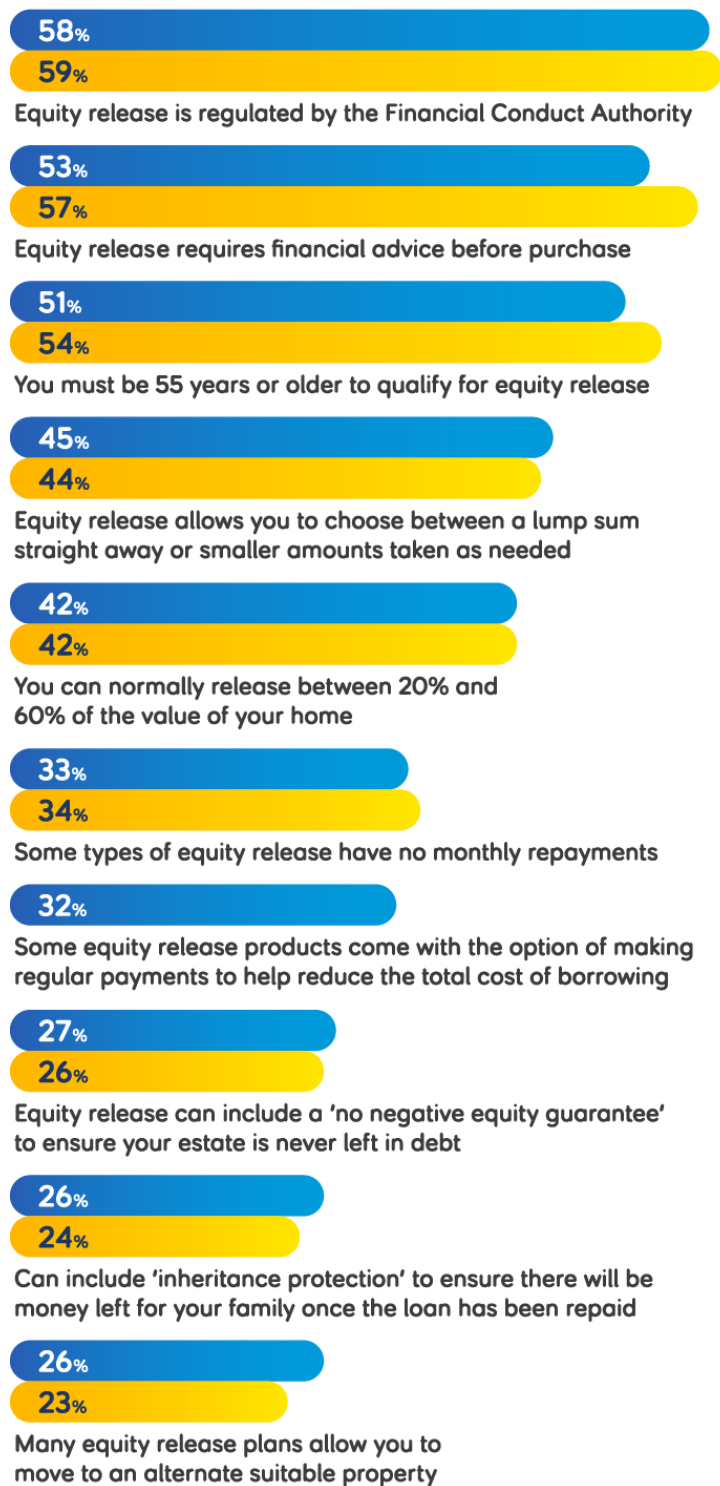
6% of eligible* homeowners have taken out equity release – up 2% since last year – representing 3% of all people over 50. But of those who haven't release equity, only 12% would consider it (-4%).

*Homeowners aged 55+ who are aware of equity release.

Only 6% know all the facts

Which of the following facts about equity release are you aware of?

● 2024
● 2023



Despite most over 50s being aware of equity release, many are unaware of the ins and outs. And awareness of many features has gone down since 2023.

For example, 53% of over 50s know you need [expert financial advice to release equity](#) – down from 57% last year.

And only 6% (+2%) of homeowners who haven't released equity know *all* the facts about equity release.

The least known fact is that equity release plans can include a 'no-negative-equity' guarantee, which means you'll never owe more than your home is worth. 42% of homeowners who are aware of equity release say they didn't know this.

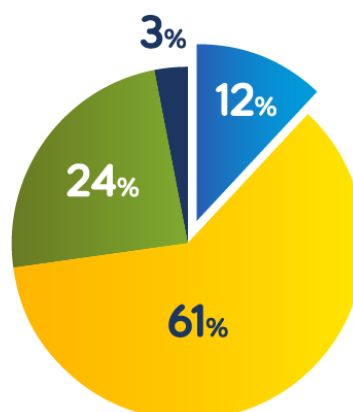
A big concern for those who say they wouldn't consider equity release is the worry that they may leave their loved ones in debt. So this unawareness could be acting as an unnecessary barrier to many people.

When the over 50s who wouldn't consider equity release were asked why not, misconceptions once again played a part – just like in 2023 and 2022. For example, some people thought releasing equity would involve too much risk, leave their family in debt, or that they would have to pay back interest.

Would you consider equity release?

(Change since 2023)

- Yes (-4%)
- No (+3%)
- I don't know (-1%)
- I don't think I would qualify (+2%)



However, equity release products that follow Equity Release Council standards have a '[no negative equity](#)' guarantee. This means someone releasing equity will never owe more than their home is worth, so their loved ones can't be left in debt from equity release.

But it's worth keeping in mind that all types of equity release products will reduce the value of an estate and [could affect eligibility for means-tested benefits](#). Anybody considering equity release should discuss their options with an expert adviser.

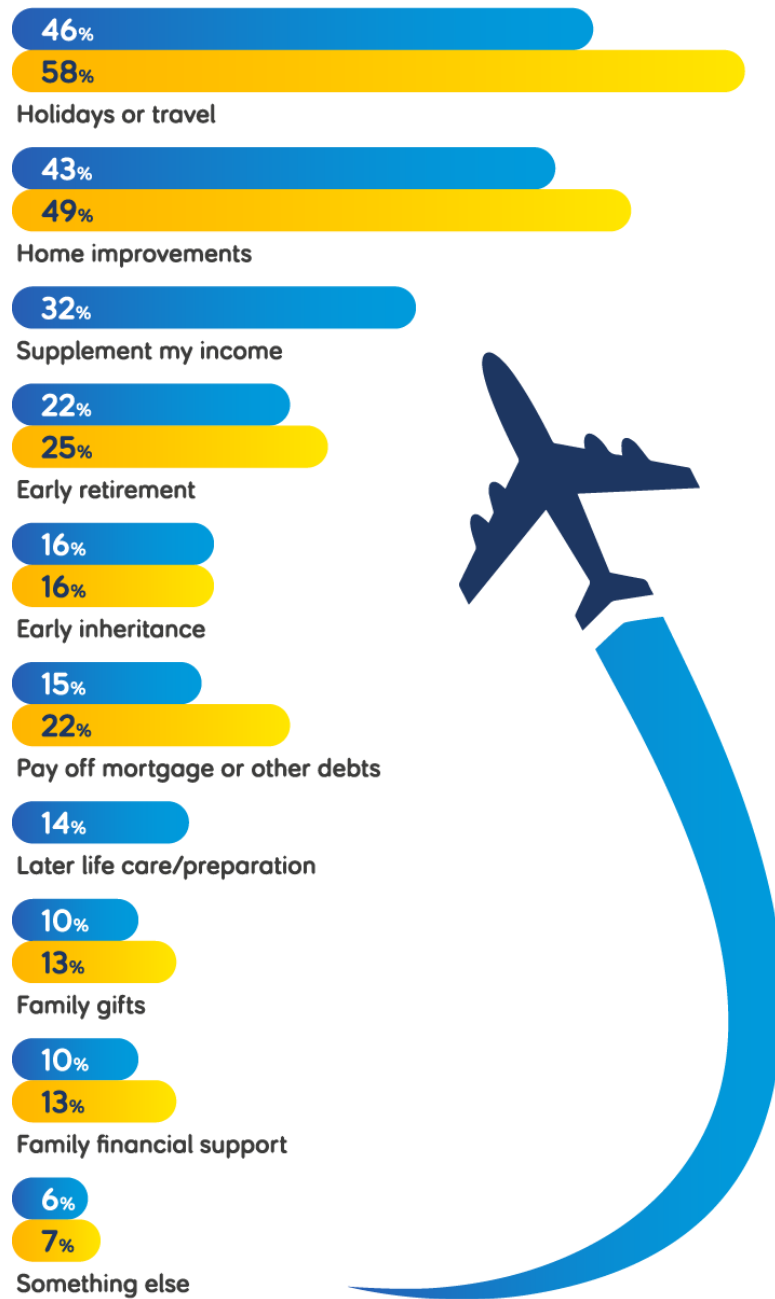
How much equity would people like to release?

On average, people who would consider equity release in 2024 would choose to release £88,747 in total – £18,000 less than last year.

If we look at the figures across the last three years, people would choose to release an average of £95,382.

This year, 46%, would spend at least some of the cash on holidays or travel, although this is down 12% since 2023. 43% (-6%) would spend it on home improvements, increasing to 47% of women. 32% would use it to supplement their income (a new addition to this year's survey). And 22% (-3%) would take an early retirement.

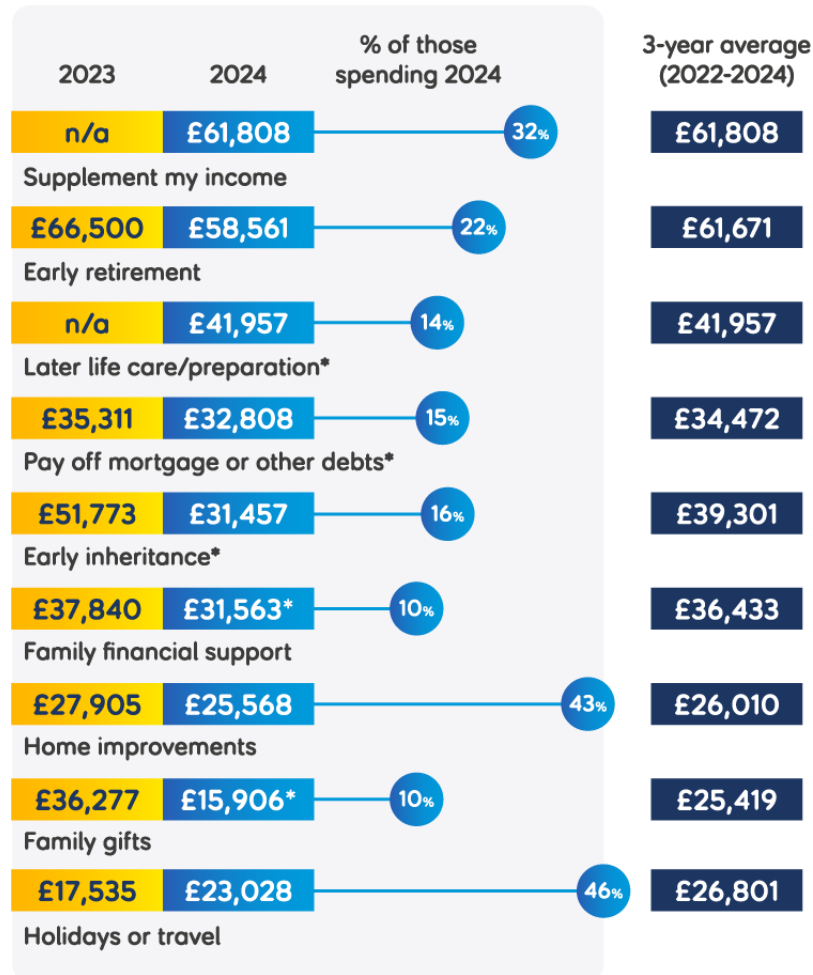
If you took out equity release, what would you spend it on?



The amount of equity release people would spend on holidays has gone up to £23,028 in 2024 – up £5,493 on last year.

Whereas the amount people would gift to family has more than halved, from £36,277 in 2023 to £15,906 in 2024 – a drop of £20,371.

If you released equity, what is the average amount you would expect to spend on each of these?



*low base size

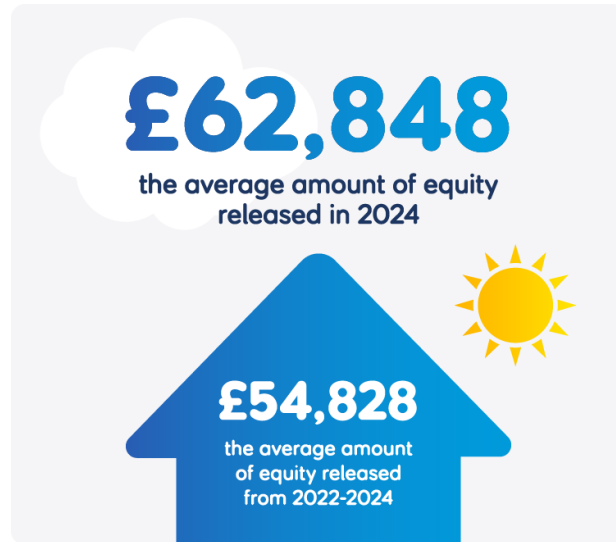
We've seen a similar shift when it comes to early inheritance, with the amount they'd spend on this dropping from £51,773 in 2023 to £31,457 in 2024. That's a drop of £20,316.

People would spend the most on supplementing their income – £61,808 – which is a new addition to this year's survey. And in second they'd spend £58,561 on early retirement (a drop of £7,939). Third is another new addition, later life care/preparation, which they'd spend £41,957 on.

How are people spending the equity they've released?

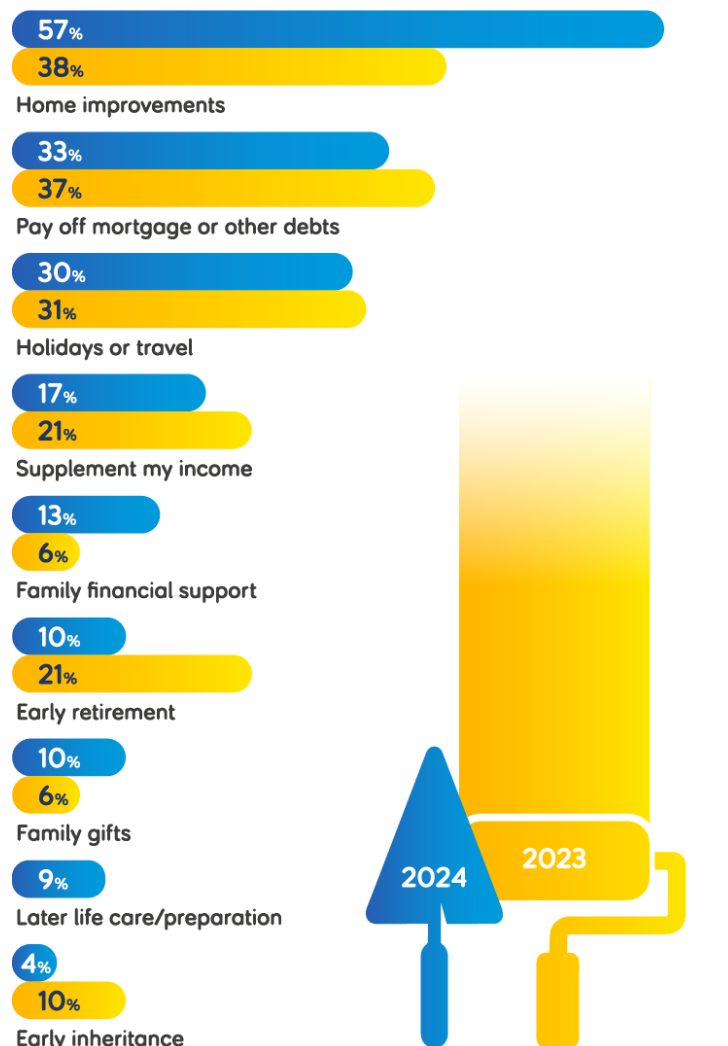
Of those who've taken out equity release (3% of all respondents), the priorities and amounts spent differ greatly from those who are considering it.

On average, they released £62,848 – £25,899 less than those in the consideration stage would like to release.



However, on average this is £11,208 more than respondents from 2023 said they had released, and £12,208 more than respondents from 2022 said they had released. And if we look at respondents from the last three years, those who have released equity say they released £54,828.

When you released equity, what did you spend it on?



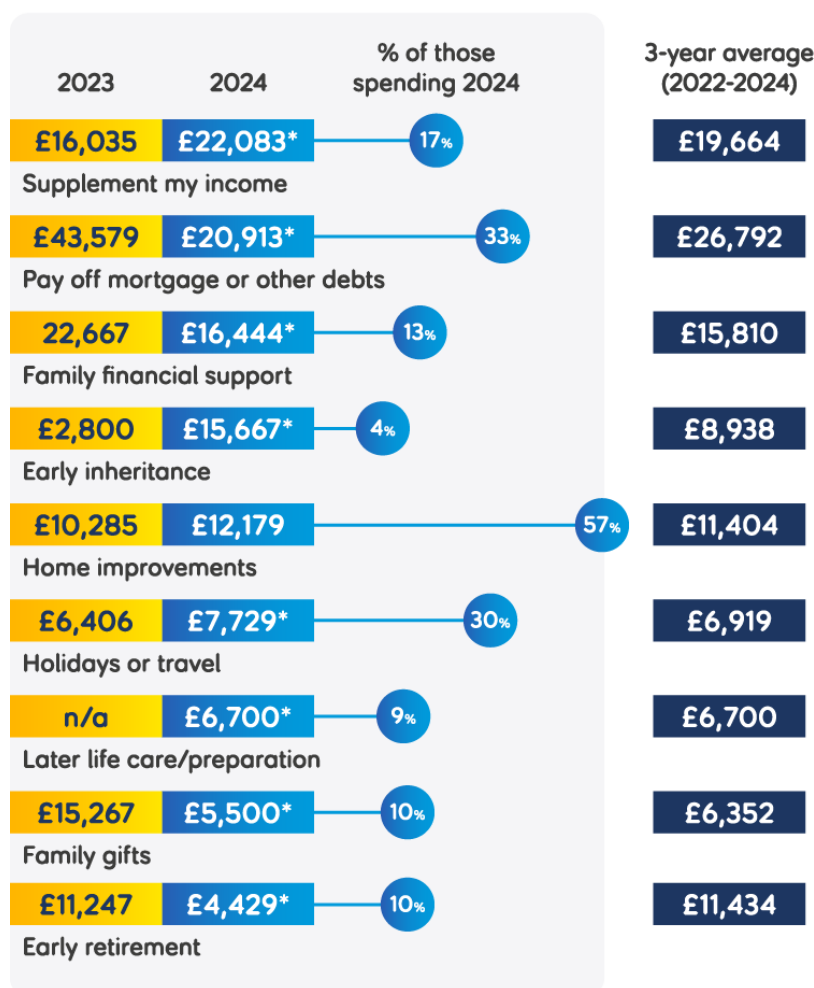
At 57%, the most popular way to spend equity release is on home improvements (+19% since 2023). Second is paying off debts (including the mortgage, which is a requirement of all equity release schemes) at 33% (-4%). And third is holidays/travel at 30% (-1%).

How much did they spend, and on what?

When we asked how much of their equity they spent on each category, 'supplement my income' comes out on top, with an average of £22,083. In 2024, people who released equity spent an average of £20,913 on paying off their mortgage or other debts.

It should be noted that with only 3% of respondents taking out equity release, these findings come from a low base.

Average spend with equity release



*low base size

They spent £6,700 on later life care and preparation, £5,500 on family gifts, £16,444 on financial support for loved ones, and £4,429 on early retirement. And they spent £15,667 on giving their loved ones an early inheritance. And when we look at how

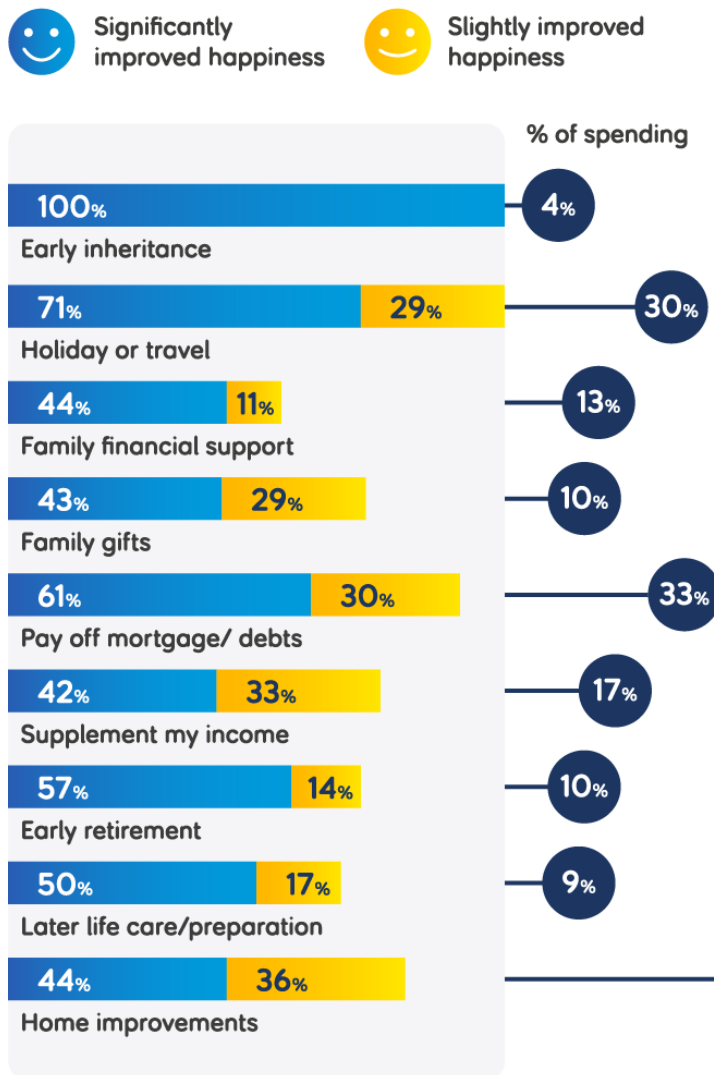
much of their equity release they're spending on family in total – so on financial support, gifts and inheritance – it comes to an overall average of £12,290.

Equity release and happiness

At 72% (+1% since 2023), almost three quarters of people who've released equity say it's made them happier. 22% (-3% since 2023) say it's had no impact on their happiness.

When it comes to the correlation between equity release spending and happiness, all equity release spends improved happiness for the majority of people. The spend with the least impact on happiness is family financial support (56%).

How did spending your equity release on these things affect your happiness?



And once again, homeowners see the three main benefits of equity release as being able to continue living in your own home (39%), being able to live more comfortably (38%), and receiving a lump sum of tax-free money (36%). So if you'd

like to know more, visit our [equity release hub](#).

Reflections on equity release...

"Really pleased my son now has his own home."

"I now can live on one floor and do not have to climb the stairs, and have a shower for my use."

"Helped me enjoy my retirement in my dream home."

"Very helpful been able to plan for the future."

"It has totally freed me that I no longer am paying a mortgage."

"Easy to arrange and has enabled me to retire."



Thank you

If you have any questions about the Life Well Spent Report 2024, or any of our past reports, contact:

pressoffice@sunlife.co.uk

