SMART INSIGHTS FROM FINANCIAL PROFESSIONALS

I'm a Wealth Adviser: This Social Security Claiming Mistake Can Hurt Women the Most



Women should personalize their Social Security claiming strategy, rather than simply following the advice to wait until 70 to file. Run the numbers after considering your life expectancy, tax situation and existing assets.

By CAMILLE BUTTERFIELD | Wealth Adviser and CFO
MONOLITH FINANCIAL GROUP | March 27, 2026

Most women don't make the wrong Social Security decision. They just make it in isolation.

That's what I see most often — thoughtful, well-intentioned decisions based on common advice, but without fully considering how that choice fits into the bigger picture.

Because **Social Security**[1] isn't just a timing decision. It's part of a much broader plan — one that includes your investments, your taxes, your lifestyle and how you want to spend your time in retirement.

WHY 'WAITING' ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST ANSWER

You can **claim Social Security**[2] as early as age 62. **Wait until 70**[3], and your benefit can be significantly higher.

For women who live well into their 80s or beyond — which many do — delaying can absolutely pay off.

But that outcome depends on more than just longevity.

The **break-even age**[4] — when delaying overtakes the value of claiming earlier — typically falls in your early 80s. If you don't live past that point, you may never fully recover the income you gave up.

And even if you do, there's another question worth asking: When do you actually want to enjoy your money?

For many people, the **early years of retirement**[5] — their 60s and early 70s — are the most active. This is when travel, hobbies and time with family often take priority.

Delaying Social Security may increase income later. But it can also mean relying more heavily on your own assets during the years when you're most likely to spend and enjoy them.

THE PART MOST PEOPLE MISS: WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR 60s

When you delay Social Security, you still need income.

For many retirees, that means withdrawing more from their investment portfolio in the early years of retirement.

And that introduces a risk many people don't fully consider.

If markets are strong, this strategy can work well. But **if the market declines early**[6] — right as withdrawals are higher — it can place added strain on a portfolio.

Those early withdrawals reduce the assets that remain invested and the ability of your portfolio to recover when markets improve.

For women planning for longer retirements, that early pressure can have long-term implications.

On the other hand, claiming Social Security earlier may reduce the need to draw as heavily from investments, potentially preserving assets and providing more stability.

Neither approach is inherently better — but each leads to a very different outcome.

THIS IS REALLY ABOUT TRADEOFFS

At its core, the Social Security decision is a balancing act between:

- Higher guaranteed income later in life
- Preserving and protecting your investment portfolio
- Maintaining flexibility in your early retirement years

Delaying increases certainty later. Claiming earlier can create flexibility sooner.

The right choice depends on how those priorities align with your goals.

YOUR OTHER ASSETS MATTER MORE THAN YOU THINK

Social Security doesn't exist in a vacuum. Your decision should reflect the full picture of what you have:

- **Pension income**[7] or other reliable sources
- Investment accounts and how they'll be used
- **Legacy goals**[8] and how you want to pass on assets

In some cases, retirees use savings in their early 60s to "bridge the gap" and delay benefits.

In others, claiming earlier helps reduce withdrawals and preserve investments.

Both approaches can be appropriate depending on the situation.

TAXES CAN QUIETLY RESHAPE THE OUTCOME

Social Security also plays a role in your tax strategy.

Retirement income[9] often comes from multiple sources, and the timing of each one matters.

Some considerations include:

- Delaying benefits may create an opportunity for **Roth conversions**[10] in lower-income years
- Waiting too long can lead to higher income later, especially when Social Security and required minimum distributions (**RMDs**[11]) overlap
- Higher income levels may increase **Medicare premiums**[12] through IRMAA

In some cases, claiming earlier and spreading income over time can help manage these effects.

FOR MARRIED WOMEN, THIS DECISION GOES BEYOND YOU

For married couples, Social Security decisions are interconnected.

When one spouse passes away, the **surviving spouse**[13] keeps the higher of the two benefits.

Because women tend to live longer, the higher earner's decision can have a lasting impact on the surviving spouse's income.

That makes coordination between spouses especially important.

THE EMOTIONAL SIDE OF THE DECISION

For many women, Social Security represents more than just income.

It represents certainty.

A guaranteed, inflation-adjusted income stream for life can provide a level of confidence that's difficult to replicate elsewhere.

And that sense of stability often plays an important role in how decisions are made.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU DECIDE

Before choosing when to claim, consider:

- How does my personal life expectancy influence this decision?
- What impact will this have on my taxes over time?
- How will this choice affect my investment portfolio, especially early in retirement?
- How do I want to balance income later with flexibility and lifestyle earlier?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Social Security is one of the most important financial decisions in retirement.

But it's not a standalone decision.

When viewed in isolation, one strategy may seem clearly better. But when you consider your investments, taxes, lifestyle and long-term goals, the answer often becomes more nuanced.

That's why this decision is best made as part of a comprehensive plan — one that brings all the pieces together.

Because, ultimately, it's not just about maximizing a benefit.

It's about creating a retirement that supports how — and when — you want to live your life.

SOURCES

1 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/social-security/601708/social-security-basics-12-things-you-must-know-about-claiming-and*

2 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/social-security/claiming-social-security-tools-and-rules-for-diy-investors*

3 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/waiting-until-70-to-claim-social-security-pros-and-cons*

4 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/using-social-security-break-even-math-can-be-risky*

5 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/happy-retirement/mistakes-to-avoid-in-your-first-year-of-retirement*

6 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/retirement-planning/sequence-of-returns-risk-strategic-withdrawals*

7 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/retiring-with-a-pension-what-to-know*

8 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/estate-planning/601651/legacy-planning-create-a-lasting-legacy*

9 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/ways-to-generate-retirement-income*

10 *https://www.kiplinger.com/taxes/tax-reasons-to-convert-your-ira-to-a-roth-and-when-you-shouldnt*

11 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/retirement-plans/required-minimum-distributions-rmds/602350/rmd-basics-12-things-you*

12 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/medicare/medicare-premiums-2026-irmaa-brackets-and-surcharges-for-parts-b-and-d*

13 *https://www.kiplinger.com/retirement/social-security/601358/qualifying-for-social-security-spousal-and-survivor-benefits*

The appearances in Kiplinger were obtained through a PR program. The columnist received assistance from a public relations firm in preparing this piece for submission to Kiplinger.com. Kiplinger was not compensated in any way.

This article was written by and presents the views of our contributing adviser, not the Kiplinger editorial staff. You can check adviser records with the SEC or with FINRA.

Insurance products are offered through the insurance business Monolith Financial Group. Monolith Financial Group is also an Investment Advisory practice that offers products and services through AE Wealth Management, LLC (AEWM), a Registered Investment Adviser. AEWM does not offer insurance products. The insurance products offered by Monolith Financial Group are not subject to Investment Adviser requirements. CA Ins. Lic. #0N14019

Please remember that converting an employer plan account to a Roth IRA is a taxable event. Increased taxable income from the Roth IRA conversion may have several consequences. Be sure to consult with a qualified tax advisor before making any decisions regarding your IRA.

Investing involves risk, including the potential loss of principal. No investment strategy can guarantee a profit or protect against loss in periods of declining values. None of the information contained on this website shall constitute an offer to sell or solicit any offer to buy a security or any insurance product. 7093553 – 6/26

MONOLITH FINANCIAL GROUP

3000 Lava Ridge Ct. Suite 120 | Roseville, CA 95661

916-367-6430

monolithfinancial.com

ADVISER INTEL Kiplinger CONTRIBUTOR