

Cohabitation F.A.Q.

- How many cohabitators are there?
- Why do couples live together without being married?
- Why do you recommend cohabitation? Why should I cohabit?
- I heard that couples who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce -- is that true?
- Does marriage make people healthier and happier than cohabitation?
- I'm confused -- should I say, "I cohabit" or "I cohabitately?"
- I'm a student working on a research project, paper, or speech about cohabitation. Can you help me?

Answers

How many cohabitators are there?

You can find lots of other statistics about cohabitation and unmarried people on our [Statistics](#) page.

Why do couples live together without being married?

Lots of reasons! Research shows that most couples who live together would like to get married someday, and within five years, slightly more than half of them do. Couples move in together because (obviously, not all reasons apply to all couples):

- They're in love, and they want to spend more time together.
- They want to make sure they're compatible before they make a lifetime commitment to each other. Many people we talk to say they couldn't imagine marrying someone if they hadn't lived together first.
- They're engaged to be married, and decide to move in together before the wedding.
- They're saving money for a wedding, and figure they'll live together in the meantime.
- They're spending most nights together anyway and don't want to pay two rents.
- They don't want to get married, or can't marry.
- They know their partner isn't a good match for a long-term relationship, but want to stick with this person for now.
- They would lose significant financial benefits if they were to marry. This predicament is especially common among senior citizens (who would sometimes lose a pension from a deceased spouse if they married) and disabled people.
- And many other reasons!

Why do you recommend cohabitation? Why should I cohabit?

We don't consider ourselves cohabitation advocates -- in fact, we believe there are plenty of people for whom cohabitation is not a good fit (just as there are plenty of people for whom marriage doesn't feel like a good fit). We do think there's a dearth of information about unmarried relationships, and we want to help remedy that by helping people can find the information they need to have healthy relationships, legal protections, good relationships with their extended families, etc. We don't recommend that anyone cohabit unless they're pretty serious about the relationship, and unless it's clear that both people want to be living together and are in agreement about what that means to them. If you're not sure about living together and you're hoping we'll convince you, you shouldn't move in together!

I heard that couples who live together before marriage are more likely to divorce -- is that true?

These studies' conclusions are frequently misrepresented in the media. Basically, studies like these are comparing apples and oranges. Most couples today live together before they marry, and research shows that on average, the minority of couples who marry without living together tend to be more religious, more conservative, and more opposed to divorce, as one would expect. So these studies actually show that people who are more opposed to divorce are less likely to divorce -- which is not particularly surprising. Researchers have found that when you "control" for the differences between the two groups, the cohabitation-divorce link decreases considerably or vanishes entirely, depending on the study. The idea that living together ruins relationships is not supported in any research.

These studies receive a great deal of publicity because conservative groups use them to try to revive "traditional" marriage (with no cohabitation and no sex before marriage). One such study was issued by the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 - read our detailed analysis here. To read some quotes from leading experts who say our analysis is on target, see our page [The Experts on Cohabitation](#).

Rather than trying to scare people away from living together when it's already so widespread, we believe it's important to help cohabitators have strong, healthy relationships. It's the reason AtMP's founders wrote *Unmarried to Each Other: The Essential Guide to Living Together as an Unmarried Partner*, and the article "[Ten Ways To Improve Your Chances for a Good Marriage After Cohabitation](#)."

Does marriage make people healthier and happier than cohabitation?

There are studies that allege that married people are happier or healthier than unmarried ones. We believe there are several good responses to these studies. Many academic experts confirm this perspective -- see [The Experts on Cohabitation](#).

First, even when studies find differences between married and unmarried people, these differences are usually quite small, based on averages from large groups. Similar differences appear whenever you compare people of different races, religions, parenting vs. childfree, etc. -- some groups appear to be better off than others. Yet if we found that people without children tended to be healthier than those with children, would we institute government programs to discourage people from having children? If we found that Catholics made more money than Buddhists, would it be acceptable to undertake a conversion program to make more people Catholic? Of course not. Yet for some reason, society-at-large finds it acceptable to try to encourage people to get married based on these studies. So what if some married people are happier than some unmarried people? If your relationship works for you, it should be your choice how and if you chose to formalize it. Even if it were true that many married people are happier than many unmarried ones,

that doesn't mean that any individual would be happier or healthier if she or he got married. There's a big difference between "most people" and "all people."

Second, it might be that at least part of the reason why married people are happier, healthier, etc. is because of the societal support they receive. They have made what is often seen as the "right choice." Their families celebrate them and include their partners as part of the family. They receive health insurance for their whole families through one spouse's employer. Their lives are represented and modeled in books, on TV, and in the movies. We believe one answer to improve life for unmarried people is to improve support and representation of us, not to try to change us into married people.

Finally, most of these studies have major flaws related to causality. Married people may be happier on average, but this may be the result of some other factor -- it may not be marriage that makes them happier. For instance, marriage is strongly tied to financial issues. It has been shown repeatedly that when finances improve (an individual's or a region's), marriage rates rise. On average, unmarried people are much poorer than married people, because most unmarried people want to marry and may do so when finances improve. Most of the studies that purport to find married people happier and healthier do not control for economics. What they are really finding is that wealthier people (married people on average) are happier and healthier than poorer people (unmarried people on average). It is widely known that poor people are more likely to receive poor health care, live in low-quality housing in unsafe neighborhoods, and face countless other daily challenges. It should come as no surprise to us that they are less happy and healthy.

In addition, it can be interesting to think about who is more likely to get married versus who is less likely to do so. For instance, people with poor social skills, poor personal hygiene, alcohol or drug addiction, and other disadvantages might be less likely to get married. These people might also be less happy or less healthy on average. Therefore, the overall pool of unmarried people might have its average "scores" reduced because of the higher numbers of these types of people in its pool.

I'm confused -- should I say, "I cohabit" or "I cohabitate?"

"Cohabit" is correct. "Cohabitate," while commonly used, is incorrect. The made-up word "cohabitate" probably came from the noun "cohabitation," and is known to nauseate grammar-sticklers.

I'm a student working on a research project, paper, or speech about cohabitation. Can you help me?

Because of the volume of requests we receive, we are not able to provide individualized assistance to students working on short-term projects (we are sometimes able to help with theses, dissertations, and other long-term research projects). You'll find the information and links on this site fairly extensive, though, so we encourage you to spend some time exploring. In particular, you might be interested in our Statistics and Experts pages, as well as specific Hot Topics sections of the site. Good luck with your project!