

Men-women life expectancy gap narrows

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Women may have longer life expectancy than men but that gap in the United States has now narrowed to five years, the shortest in 50 years.

The National Center for Health Statistics says if the trend continues, men and women will live the same length of time in another 50 years, The New York Times reports.

The report says women have had the life expectancy edge since the late 19th century, allowing them to develop strong friendships to support them in their later years and not having to cater to men.

The other side of the picture is that if men live longer, women are less likely to suffer the fate of dying alone. Under the current life expectancy gap, women are more likely than men to be widowed, the report said. Being alone also raises their risk of dying or getting sick.

"Even given the limited capacity of men, having a surviving spouse is going to mean that women do not go as early to nursing homes when they have chronic illnesses," said Ronald D. Lee with the Center on the Economics and Demography of Aging at the University of California. Shorter widowhood also means women will be better off financially as men, who as higher wage earners, get bigger Social Security checks and pensions.

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