

GETTING OLD PAYS OFF



How to locate senior discounts as early as age 50

Dear Savvy Senior: What types of senior discounts are available to baby boomers, at what age do they kick in, and what's the best way to go about finding them?

— Almost 50

Dear Almost: One of the great perks of growing older in America is the many discounts that are available to boomers and seniors.

There are literally thousands of discounts on a wide variety of products and services including restaurants, grocery stores, travel and lodging, entertainment, retail and apparel, health and beauty, automotive services and much more. These discounts – typically ranging between 5 and 25 percent off – can add up to save you hundreds of dollars each year.

So, if you don't mind admitting your age, here are some tips and tools to help you find the discounts you may be eligible for.

ALWAYS ASK

The first thing to know is that most businesses don't advertise them, but many give senior discounts just for the asking, so don't be shy.

You also need to know that while some discounts are available as soon as you turn 50, many others may not kick in until you turn 55, 60, 62 or 65.

SEARCH ONLINE

Because senior discounts frequently change and can vary depending on where you live and the time of the year, the Internet is the easiest way to help you locate them.

To do a search, start by visiting SeniorDiscounts.com, which lists thousands of discounts that you can search for by city and state, and by the category you're interested in, for free.

You can also look for discounts at TheSeniorList.com, which

provides a large list of national and regional business chains that offer them, or you can Google them individually. Just go to Google.com and type in the business or organization you're curious about, followed by "senior discount" or "senior discount tickets."

If you use a smartphone, another tool is the Sciddy app (see Sciddy.com) that lets you search for senior discounts and can send you alerts when you're at an establishment that offers them.

JOIN A CLUB

Another good avenue to senior discounts is through membership organizations like AARP, which offers its 50 and older members a wide variety of discounts through affiliate businesses (see AARPdiscounts.com).

If, however, you're not the AARP type, there are other alternative organizations you can join that also provide discounts such as The Seniors Coalition or the American Seniors Association. Or, for federal workers, there's the National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association.

TYPES OF DISCOUNTS

Here's an abbreviated rundown of some of the different types of discounts you can expect to find.

Restaurants: Senior discounts are common at restaurants and fast food establishments – like Burger King, Chick-fil-A, Subway, Wendy's, Applebee's and Golden Corral – ranging from free/discounted drinks, to discounts off your total order.

Retailers: Many thrift stores like Goodwill, and certain retailers like Banana Republic, Kohl's, Michaels and Ross stores offer a break to seniors on certain days of the week.

Supermarkets: Many locally owned grocery stores offer senior discount programs, as do some chains like Albertsons, Kroger, Publix and Fry's Supermarkets, which offer some discounts on certain days of the week but they vary by location.

Travel: Southwest Airlines provide the best senior fares in the U.S. to passengers 65 and older,

while Amtrak offers a 15 percent discount and Greyhound offers 5 percent off to travelers over 62. Most car rental companies provide discounts to customers who belong to organizations like AARP. Royal Caribbean, Celebrity and Carnival cruise lines offer discount rates to cruisers 55 and over. And, most hotels offer senior discounts, usually ranging from 10 to 30 percent.

Entertainment: Most movie theaters, museums, golf courses, ski slopes and other public entertainment venues provide reduced admission to seniors over 60 or 65. And the National Park Service offers a lifetime pass for those 62 and up for \$10 (see nps.gov/find-apark/passess.htm).

Send your senior questions to: Savvy Senior, P.O. Box 5443, Norman, OK 73070, or visit SavvySenior.org. Jim Miller is a contributor to the NBC Today show and author of "The Savvy Senior" book.

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HOW WORK AFFECTS YOUR MEDICARE DECISIONS



Older workers need to watch out for these Medicare enrollment mistakes

Dear Savvy Senior: *Should I enroll in Medicare at age 65 if I'm still working and have coverage through my employer?*

— Approaching 65

Dear Approaching: The rules for enrolling in Medicare can be very confusing with all the different choices available today. But when you postpone retirement past age 65, as many people are doing, it becomes even more complicated.

First, let's review the basics. Remember that original Medicare has two parts: Part A, which provides hospital coverage and is free for most people. And Part B, which covers doctor's bills, lab tests and outpatient care. Part B also has a monthly premium of \$134 for most new (2017) enrollees.



If you're already receiving Social Security, you will be enrolled automatically in parts A and B when you turn 65, and you'll receive your Medicare card in the mail. It will include instructions to return it if you have work coverage that qualifies you for late enrollment.

If you aren't yet receiving Social Security, you will have to apply, which you can do online at SSA.gov/medicare, over the phone at 800-772-1213 or through your local Social Security office.

If you plan to continue working past the age of 65 and have health insurance from your job, your first step is to ask your benefits manager or human resources department

how your employer insurance works with Medicare. In most cases, you should at least take Medicare Part A because it's free. But to decide whether to take Part B or not will depend on the size of your employer.

SMALL EMPLOYER

If your current employer (or spouse's employer if it's providing your coverage) has fewer than 20 employees, Medicare

will be your primary insurer and you should enroll in Medicare Part B during your initial enrollment period. This is a seven-month period that includes the three months before, the month of, and the three

months after your 65th birthday.

If you miss the seven-month sign-up window, you'll have to wait until the next general enrollment period, which runs from Jan. 1 to March 31 with benefits beginning the following July 1. You'll also incur a 10 percent penalty for each year you wait beyond your initial enrollment period, which will be tacked on to your monthly Part B premium.

LARGE EMPLOYER

If your employer has 20 or more employees, your employer's group health plan will be your primary insurer as long as you (or your spouse if the coverage is from his/her employer) remain an active employee. If this is the case, you don't need to



enroll in Part B when you turn 65 if you're satisfied with the coverage you are getting through your job. But if you do decide to enroll in Medicare, it will supplement your employer insurance by paying secondary on all of your claims.

Once your employment (or group health coverage) ends, you will then have eight months to sign up for Part B without a penalty. This is known as the Special Enrollment Period.



DRUG COVERAGE

You also need to verify your prescription drug coverage.

Call your benefits manager or insurance company to find out if your employer's prescription drug coverage is considered "creditable." Creditable coverage is one that is considered to be as good as or better than the Medicare prescription drug benefit.) If it is, you don't need to enroll in a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan. If it isn't, you should purchase a plan (see Medicare.gov/find-a-plan) during your initial enrollment period or you'll incur a premium penalty (1 percent of the average national premium for every month you don't have coverage) if you enroll later.

For more assistance, call Medicare at 800-633-4227 or contact your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (see shiptacenter.org), which provides free Medicare counseling.

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FLU SHOTS FOR SENIORS

Specialized vaccines that can help protect seniors this flu season



Dear Savvy Senior: Are there any specific flu shots that are better suited for seniors? I just turned 65 and would like to find out what's recommended and how Medicare covers it.

— Semi-Healthy Senior

Dear Semi-Healthy: There are actually two different flu vaccines available this year that are designed specifically for seniors age 65 and older. One option is the Fluzone High-Dose, which has been available since 2010, and the other is the new FDA approved FLUAD vaccine (you only need to get one of these).

The Fluzone High-Dose (see Fluzone.com) is a high-potency vaccine that contains four times the amount of antigen as a regular flu shot does, which creates a stronger immune response for better protection. While the new FLUAD vaccine (FLUAD.com) contains an added ingredient called adjuvant MF59 that also helps create a stronger immune response.

The extra protection these vaccines provide is particularly helpful to seniors who have weaker immune defenses and have a greater risk of developing dangerous flu complications. The CDC estimates that the flu puts more than 200,000 people in the hospital each year and kills an average of 24,000 – 80 to 90 percent of whom are seniors.

But be aware that both the Fluzone High-Dose and FLUAD are not recommended for seniors who are allergic to chicken eggs, or those who have had a severe reaction to a flu vaccine

in the past.

You should also know that the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend one vaccination over the other, and to date, there have been no studies comparing the two vaccines.

If you decide you don't want to get a senior-specific flu shot, there are other options available to people 65 years and older including the standard (trivalent) flu shot, the quadrivalent flu shot which protects against four different flu viruses, and the FluBlok vaccine for those who have egg allergies.

To locate a vaccination site that offers any of these flu shots, visit Vaccines.gov and type in your ZIP code. You'll also be happy to know that as a Medicare beneficiary, Part B will cover 100 percent of the costs of any flu shot, as long as your doctor, health clinic or pharmacy agrees not to charge you more than Medicare pays.

PNEUMONIA VACCINES

Two other important vaccinations the CDC recommends to seniors, especially this time of year, are the pneumococcal

vaccines for pneumonia.

Around 1 million Americans are hospitalized with pneumonia each year, and about 50,000 people die from it.

The CDC is now recommending that all seniors, 65 or older, get two vaccinations – Pnevnar 13 and Pneumovax 23. Both vaccines, which are administered just once at different times, work in different ways to provide maximum protection.

If you haven't yet received any pneumococcal vaccine you should get the Pnevnar 13 first, followed by Pneumovax 23 six to 12 months later. But if you've already been vaccinated with Pneumovax 23, wait at least one year before getting the Pnevnar 13.

Medicare Part B covers both shots, if they are taken at least one year apart.

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FINDING A LOST PENSION



How to locate forgotten retirement benefits you may be eligible for

Dear Savvy Senior: What tips can you offer for tracking down a lost pension from a previous employer?

— About to Retire

Dear About: It's not unusual for a worker to lose track of a pension benefit. Perhaps you left an employer long ago and forgot that you left behind a pension. Or maybe you worked for a company that changed owners or went belly up many years ago, and you figured the pension went with it.

Today, millions of dollars in benefits are sitting in pension plans across the U.S. or with the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC), a federal government agency, waiting to be claimed by their rightful owners. The average unclaimed benefit with PBGC is about \$6,500.

To help you look for a pension, here are some steps to take and some free resources that can help you search if your previous employer has gone out of business, relocated, changed owners or merged with another firm.

CONTACT EMPLOYER

If you think you have a pension and the company you worked for still is in business, your first step is to call the human resources department and ask how to contact the pension plan administrator. Ask the administrator whether you have a pension, how much it is worth and how to claim it. Depending on how complete the administrator's records are you may need to show proof that you once worked for the company and that you are pension eligible.

Your old income tax returns

and W-2 forms from the years you worked at the company will help you here. If you haven't saved your old tax returns from these years, you can get a copy of your earnings record from the Social Security Administration, which will show how much you were paid each calendar year by each employer.

Call 800-772-1213, and ask for Form SSA-7050, "Request for Social Security Earnings Information," or you can download it at ssa.gov/online/ssa-7050.pdf. The SSA charges a \$136 for this information.

Some other old forms that can help you prove pension eligibility are summary plan descriptions that you should have received from your employer when you worked there, and any individual benefit statements that you received during your employment.

SEARCH PBGC

If your former employer went out of business or if the company still is in business but terminated its pension plan, check with the PBGC, which guarantees pension payouts to private-sector workers if their pension plans fail, up to annual limits. Most people receive the full benefit they earned before the plan was terminated. The PBGC offers an online pension-search directory tool at search.pbgc.gov/mp/mp.aspx.

GET HELP

If you need help tracking down your former company because it may have moved, changed owners or merged with another firm, contact the Pension Rights Center, a nonprofit consumer organization that offers seven free Pension Counseling and Information Projects around the U.S. that serve 30 states. For more information, visit pensionrights.org or call 888-420-6550.



If you, your company or your pension plan happens to be outside the 30-state area served by the projects, or if you're trying to locate a federal or military pension, use Pension Help America at pensionhelp.org. This resource can connect you with government agencies and private

organizations that provide free information and assistance to help your search.

For more pension searching tips, see the PBGC's free online publication called "Finding a Lost Pension" at pbgc.gov/documents/finding-a-lost-pension.pdf.

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