Turning 65: A Medicare Checklist

What to do in the months around your 65th birthday, and which of those steps carry a penalty if you miss them.

WHO THIS IS FOR - Anyone approaching 65, and family helping them

Work down the list and tick what you have confirmed. Anything left unticked is a question worth asking before you enrol.

Your Initial Enrollment Period is seven months

It runs for seven months: the three months before the month you turn 65, your birthday month, and the three months after. Enrolling in the first three months generally means coverage starts the month you turn 65; enrolling later can delay the start.

This window matters because two of the penalties attached to Medicare are permanent, not one-time.

Three months before

- [ ] Decide whether you are enrolling in Part B now or delaying it. If you have creditable coverage through active employment - yours or a spouse's - delaying may be appropriate and penalty-free. Get that creditable status confirmed in writing.
- [ ] If you already receive Social Security, enrolment in Parts A and B is generally automatic. If not, you enrol yourself.
- [ ] List your prescriptions with exact dosages.
- [ ] List the doctors and hospitals you want to keep.

The structural decision

Original Medicare (Parts A and B) plus a Medicare Supplement plus a standalone Part D drug plan is one path. A Medicare Advantage plan (Part C) - which bundles hospital, medical, and usually drug coverage through a private carrier with its own network - is the other.

These are genuinely different trade-offs, not better and worse. Supplements generally cost more monthly and less at the point of care, with wide provider access. Advantage plans generally cost less monthly, use a network, and may include extras - with more variability in what you pay when you use care.

One timing point is worth knowing before choosing: there is a one-time Medigap open enrollment period, six months beginning when you are 65 and enrolled in Part B, during which supplement plans are available without medical underwriting. Outside that window, in most states, a supplement can require underwriting and can be declined. That asymmetry is why the first choice deserves more care than the ones after it.

The penalties, plainly

- [ ] Part B: the late-enrolment penalty is generally 10% of the standard premium for each full 12-month period you could have had Part B and did not. It is added for as long as you have Part B.

- [ ] Part D: the late-enrolment penalty is calculated per month without creditable drug coverage, as a percentage of the national base beneficiary premium, and generally also lasts as long as you have Part D.
- [ ] Both are avoidable with either timely enrolment or documented creditable coverage. "I did not need medication yet" is not creditable coverage.

Documents to have ready

- [ ] Your Medicare number and card, once issued.
- [ ] Proof of any creditable employer coverage, and its dates.
- [ ] A current medication list with dosages.
- [ ] Your list of doctors and preferred hospital.

Your notes

What this checklist does not do

- This is general federal guidance. Plan availability, supplement pricing, and underwriting rules vary by state and by carrier.
- It does not determine your eligibility, your premium, or whether your employer coverage is creditable - your plan administrator confirms the latter.
- Medicare rules and premium amounts change. Verify current figures at Medicare.gov before acting.
- Do not share your Medicare number in response to an unsolicited call, text, or email. No legitimate enrolment process begins that way.

Official sources

Medicare.gov - official U.S. government site for Medicare - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
https://www.medicare.gov/

Medicare sign-up periods and late-enrolment penalties - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/sign-up

State Health Insurance Assistance Programs - free local counselling - SHIP National Technical Assistance Center
https://www.shiphelp.org/

IMPORTANT

Plan availability, pricing, and eligibility - including subsidy eligibility and medically underwritten coverage - depend on your location, household, income, and health history, and are determined by carriers and marketplaces, not by this site. Nothing here is a guarantee of coverage, acceptance, savings, or price.

This worksheet is educational. Filling it in does not apply for coverage, does not determine eligibility, and is not a quote.

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR OWN SITUATION

Carter Bishop - Independent Insurance Broker - Palm Harbor, FL
Call or text (352) 769-2245 - solutions.carterbishop@gmail.com - bishopplans.com
Florida licence 2-40 #G089818 - National Producer Number 21065164