

Should I Enroll in Medicare's Prescription Drug Benefit (Part D)



It depends on whether you already have drug coverage, your income, and how much you currently spend on drugs.

If you have drug coverage now that is at least as good as or better than Medicare's basic drug benefit (creditable) you probably should keep it. You can join a Medicare private drug plan later without penalty if you need it. You should have received a letter from the company that provides your drug benefits—such as an insurance company, employer or state program—telling you whether your coverage is creditable. If you were not notified, call and ask for this information in writing.

If you have no drug coverage, or have coverage that is not as good as Medicare's, you need to think about whether the Medicare drug benefit will help you.

To decide if the Medicare drug benefit will help you if you do not have other drug coverage, here are some questions to consider:

- **Can I get help paying for Medicare drug coverage if my income is low?** If your income is less than about \$1,354 a month (\$1,821 for couples)* you may qualify for Extra Help, a federal program that helps with the costs of a Medicare private drug plan. If you sign up for a drug plan any time and have Extra Help, you will not have to pay a premium penalty. Call Social Security at 800-772-1213 or www.ssa.gov to apply. If you have other drug coverage, talk to your drug plan provider to find out which is best for you.
- **Would a Medicare drug plan save me money?** Make a list of your prescriptions, the dosages, and what you pay each month. Then compare what you pay now with what you would pay if you enrolled in a plan (including the monthly premium). To find out how much you would pay with a drug plan in your area, call 800-MEDICARE or use Medicare's online comparison tool at www.medicare.gov.
 - **If you have high drug costs,** you may save money through a Medicare drug plan. But make sure the plan you choose covers the drugs you need and works at the pharmacies you use most.
 - **If you have low drug costs,** having Medicare drug coverage could cost you more now, but could protect you from high drug costs in the future. There may be a Medicare drug plan in your area with a low monthly premium you can afford. If you do not enroll when you are first eligible and do not have Extra Help, you will pay a penalty if you enroll later. The penalty may be small (1% of the average national premium for every month you do not have coverage—\$30.36 in 2009). But you will not be able to enroll until the next enrollment period (Nov. 15 – Dec. 31 each year), so you will have no coverage if your drug needs change in the course of a year. There may also be other low-cost ways to get the drugs you need. To find out, call your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (call 800-MEDICARE for the number).

Have questions about enrolling in a Part D plan? Call the Medicare Rights Center's consumer hotline at 800-333-4114, Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., Eastern Time.

*These income limits will change in February or March of each year.