

BLOG – LATEST NEWS

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6 TIPS FOR SAVING MONEY ON HEALTH CARE EXPENSES



There's deliberate rationale behind the fact that Americans are paying more and more out-of-pocket costs for their health care. With high-deductible health plans, insurers and employers are asking consumers to share in the cost of their own medical care. They believe consumers will make more informed (and conservative) decisions about what medications and procedures they really need and what they can do without.

At its best, [consumer-driven health care](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consumer-driven_healthcare) makes health care costs more transparent and allows individuals to control what kinds of health care they do and do not want to pay for. The problem is, lots of people are [simply avoiding needed medical and follow-up care](#) altogether because they just can't afford the costs. In addition, as prescription costs continue to rise, people are delaying retirement, working extra hours, curtailing their grocery shopping and even [rationing their medications in order to get by](#).

The landscape of health care and health costs are sure to continue to change. In the meantime, getting a leg up on your side of consumer-driven plans means making the most of the discounts, tax breaks and competitive pricing available to you.

Ask your health care provider if they offer financial assistance

A lot of people assume you need to be destitute to receive discounted or waived fees from your doctor's office. [That's just not the case](https://www.bankrate.com/finance/debt/get-financial-help-hospital-bills.aspx), however. In fact, if your household brings in up to 3 times [the federal poverty level](https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl), you still may be eligible for 50% off your providers' fees. For a family of 4, that's \$75,300 per year. Even if you make more than that, it's worth asking your providers about financial assistance. For example, the ["Community Care" program](https://www.uwhealth.org/patient-guides/billing-and-insurance/community-care/10185)



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Sign up for a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) or Health Savings Account (HSA)

If you are insured through your employer, look into automatically [transferring some of your paycheck](#) [<https://safetynet.com/blog/payroll-hacks-milk-paycheck/>] into a pre-tax Flexible Spending Account. If you have a high-deductible health insurance from the marketplace, set up a [Health Savings Account](#) [<https://safetynet.com/blog/health-savings-accounts-7-things-to-know-about-hsas/>] through a bank. Either way, the money you deposit into those accounts will not be counted as taxable income. You can then draw from that account to pay for health-related products and services you'd be paying for anyway such as eye glasses, co-pays and prescriptions. Talk to your Human Resources department or local bank to learn more.

Look into any wellness benefits offered by your employer or health insurer

Healthy people result in lower health care costs for everyone. That's why employers and insurers sometimes offer "wellness programs" or other perks to incentivize you to maintain good health.

You may be eligible for partial or whole reimbursements for programs for weight loss or smoking cessation. Some benefits will help pay for workout equipment, therapy sessions or meditation courses for stress management. Others offer gym membership discounts or reimbursements if you work out a certain number of times within a set time period. Recently, some employers have started offering points programs for participating in healthy activities (eating well or walking or running as recorded by a Fitbit, for example), which then translate into gift cards to retail stores. Be careful, though: before you provide information about your health via [biometric screenings](#) [<https://medlineplus.gov/healthscreening.html>], or even Fitbit data, ask how the information will be used and with whom it will be shared. Call your human resources department or insurance provider for more information.

Comparison shop for your prescription costs

Don't assume that your drug store charges the same amount for the same prescription as other pharmacies and retail stores in your area—or reputable online pharmacies, for that matter. Last year [Consumer Reports secretly shopped](#) [<https://www.consumerreports.org/drug-prices/shop-around-for-better-drug-prices/>] for medications at a number of retailers, including Costco, CVS/Target, Walgreens and Rite Aid, and found the cost varied dramatically for the same generic drugs. (HealthWarehouse.com and Costco came in as the best deals, by the way.) They also recommend you ask your pharmacist if they will honor online coupons. Consider even just asking for a better price, as [some pharmacists are bound by "gag clauses"](#) that [<https://www.consumerreports.org/drug-prices/how-to-pay-less-for-your-meds/>] prohibit them from suggesting cheaper alternatives without being prompted.

Negotiate healthcare bills

If you're slapped with a big healthcare bill, contact your provider's billing department and see if you can negotiate the costs. Even on good days, it can be hard to embark on negotiations with big companies. Being sick or financially stressed out can make those calls even harder. But it's worth [negotiating your medical bills](#) [<https://safetynet.com/blog/negotiating-medical-costs/>]. Especially if you are uninsured or have a very high deductible, your provider is likely to work with you. After all, they would rather receive SOME money than none at all.

Ask your provider if they offer a prompt-pay discount

If you are paying out-of-pocket for a procedure, ask your physician's office if they offer a discount if you pay for it all up front. Because [it lowers the administrative costs](#) [<https://www.aafp.org/fpm/1999/0300/p54.html>], of billing and other paperwork, it may be in their best interest to do so.

[<https://www.consumerreports.org/healthcare-costs/ways-to-save-on-your-healthcare-costs/>]. The more you ask, the easier it gets. And in this consumer-driven health care trend, you will likely find that your employers and health care providers have fielded those same questions many times before.

MARCH 1, 2019 | BY VRENI PIGORSCH

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