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Your Guide to a Richer Retirement

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8 Medicare Choices You Must Make

ENROLLING IN MEDICARE, WHICH YOU CAN DO STARTING at age 65, comes with a series of decisions for making the most of this health care coverage. Getting it wrong can mean costly coverage gaps and lifetime late-enrollment penalties. Because the rules are often confusing and hard to follow, Medicare doesn't make it easy to do the right thing. Here are eight Medicare crossroads you should know how to navigate.

When Should You Sign Up?

Some people are enrolled automatically in Medicare, but most will need to sign up in time to dodge late-enrollment penalties.

You're on Social Security. Anyone who has claimed Social Security benefits at least four months before age 65 is automatically enrolled in Medicare. You'll receive your Medicare card in the mail and can start using it the first day of the month you turn 65 (or the start of the previous month, if your birthday falls on the first).

You're automatically enrolled in Medicare Part A and Part B (in Puerto Rico, you're only enrolled automatically in Part A). Medicare Part A covers hospitalization, skilled nursing care, some home health care and hospice benefits. Part B covers doctor and outpatient services.

Most people need both Part A and Part B. But if you have qualifying health insurance from your own or your spouse's employer, you can send back the card and delay signing up for Part B without penalty.

You haven't claimed Social Security. Now that the age for receiving full Social Security benefits is 66 and

IN THIS ISSUE

INVESTING

7 | Stocks for Inflationary Times

TAXES

9 | Home Sales

10 | Rules for Snowbirds

11 | ITAO

RETIREMENT LIVING

13 | Cohousing Communities

REAL ESTATE

15 | Selling to an iBuyer

CONSUMER SPENDING

17 | Meal Kits