

Medical Deductions

Keep in mind that lots of things you might not regard as medical expenses are deductible. Paying for these will add to your total medical expenses for the year.

The IRS broadly defines deductible medical expenses to include any payment for “the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease, or treatment affecting any structure or function of the body.” That covers a lot of territory.

It includes, of course, money you spend on doctors and dentists; as well as nursing care, hospitalization, lab fees, and long-term care. But medical expenses include much more—for example, you may deduct fees you pay to chiropractors, psychiatrists, optometrists, psychologists, osteopaths, acupuncturists, podiatrists, and even Christian Science practitioners. You can also deduct things like transportation costs for health treatment and the cost of remodeling your home to accommodate a handicap (adding wheelchair ramps, for example).

You can include in medical expenses the amount you pay for a legal abortion.

You can include in medical expenses the amount you pay for acupuncture.

You can include in medical expenses amounts you pay for an inpatient's treatment at a therapeutic center for alcohol addiction. This includes meals and lodging provided by the center during treatment. You can also include in medical expenses amounts you pay for transportation to and from Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in your community if the attendance is pursuant to medical advice that membership in Alcoholics Anonymous is necessary for the treatment of a disease involving the excessive use of alcoholic liquors.

You can include in medical expenses amounts you pay for ambulance service.

You can include in medical expenses the amount you pay for an artificial limb.

You can include in medical expenses the amount you pay for artificial teeth.

You can include in medical expenses the cost of medical supplies such as bandages.

You can include in medical expenses the amount you pay for birth control pills prescribed by a doctor.

You can include in medical expenses the cost of an electronic body scan.

You can include in medical expenses the part of the cost of Braille books and magazines for use by a visually impaired person that is more than the cost of regular printed editions.

You can include in medical expenses the cost of breast pumps and supplies that assist lactation.

You can include in medical expenses the amounts you pay for breast reconstruction surgery, as well as breast prosthesis, following a mastectomy for cancer.

You can include in medical expenses amounts you pay for special equipment installed in a home, or for improvements, if their main purpose is medical care for you, your spouse, or your dependent. The cost of permanent improvements that increase the value of your property may be partly included as a medical expense. The cost of the improvement is reduced by the increase in the value of your property. The difference is a medical expense. If the value of your property is not increased by the improvement, the entire cost is included as a medical expense.

Certain improvements made to accommodate a home to your disabled condition, or that of your spouse or your dependents who live with you, do not usually increase the value of the home and the cost can be included in full as medical expenses. These improvements include, but are not limited to, the following items.

- Constructing entrance or exit ramps for your home.
- Widening doorways at entrances or exits to your home.
- Widening or otherwise modifying hallways and interior doorways.
- Installing railings, support bars, or other modifications to bathrooms.
- Lowering or modifying kitchen cabinets and equipment.
- Moving or modifying electrical outlets and fixtures.
- Installing porch lifts and other forms of lifts (but elevators generally add value to the house).
- Modifying fire alarms, smoke detectors, and other warning systems.
- Modifying stairways.
- Adding handrails or grab bars anywhere (whether or not in bathrooms).
- Modifying hardware on doors.
- Modifying areas in front of entrance and exit doorways.
- Grading the ground to provide access to the residence.

However, there are some health-related expenses that are not deductible. For example, you may not deduct nonprescription drugs or the cost of cosmetic surgery (but reconstructive surgery is deductible). Nor can you deduct veterinary fees.

You may not deduct funeral or burial expenses, over-the-counter medicines, toothpaste, toiletries, cosmetics, a trip or program for the general improvement of your health, or most cosmetic surgery. You may not deduct amounts paid for nicotine gum and nicotine patches, which do not require a prescription.

You can only include the medical expenses you paid during the year. Your total deductible medical expenses for the year must be reduced by any reimbursement of deductible medical expenses. It makes no difference if you receive the reimbursement or if it is paid directly to the doctor, hospital, or other medical provider.