



Avoiding Common Medicare Enrollment Mistakes

A Guide to Making Informed Decisions and Maximizing Your Coverage

Navigating Medicare can be overwhelming, especially for first-time enrollees or those reviewing their options during open enrollment. However, making informed decisions can help you avoid costly penalties, coverage gaps, and unexpected healthcare expenses. Below are some of the most common Medicare enrollment mistakes — and how to avoid them.

1. Missing Key Enrollment Deadlines

Medicare enrollment is governed by specific timeframes and missing them can have serious consequences.

Initial Enrollment Period (IEP):

This is a 7-month window that begins three months before your 65th birthday, includes your birthday month, and ends three months after.

- **Common Mistake:** Failing to enroll during your IEP can lead to delayed coverage and lifetime late enrollment penalties for Part B and Part D.
- **What to Do:** Mark your calendar and enroll on time. If you're still working and have group health coverage, you may qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) later.

Annual Enrollment Period (AEP):

Occurs every year from October 15 to December 7.

- **Common Mistake:** Overlooking this opportunity to review and change your coverage. Life and health needs change — and so do plans.
- **What to Do:** Use the AEP to compare plans and ensure your current coverage still meets your needs for the upcoming year.

Medicare Advantage Open Enrollment Period:

Runs from January 1 to March 31 annually.

- **Common Mistake:** Believing you're locked into your Medicare Advantage Plan for the entire year.
- **What to Do:** If you're enrolled in a Medicare Advantage plan, you can use this period to switch to a different plan or return to Original Medicare.

2. Choosing the Wrong Type of Plan

One size doesn't fit all when it comes to Medicare coverage. Understanding your options is critical.

Original Medicare (Parts A & B), Medicare Advantage (Part C), and Medigap (Supplemental Insurance):

- **Common Mistake:** Selecting a plan without fully understanding how each option works — including differences in provider networks, out-of-pocket costs, and coverage limits.



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- **What to Do:** Take time to research the pros and cons of each path. Consider your current healthcare needs, budget, travel habits, and preferred providers.

Prescription Drug Coverage (Part D):

- **Common Mistake:** Assuming prescription coverage is included or delaying enrollment because you don't currently take medications.
- **What to Do:** If you have Original Medicare and want drug coverage, enroll in a standalone Part D plan — even if you're not currently on medications — to avoid penalties and future gaps.

3. Ignoring Late Enrollment Penalties

Failing to enroll in Medicare on time can result in permanent financial penalties.

Part B Late Enrollment Penalty: Your monthly premium may increase by 10% for every 12-month period you were eligible but didn't enroll — and this penalty lasts for life.

Part D Late Enrollment Penalty: If you go 63 days or more without creditable drug coverage, you'll face an ongoing penalty added to your Part D premium.

- **Common Mistake:** Underestimating the long-term financial impact of enrolling late.
- **What to Do:** Know the rules and deadlines for each part of Medicare. If you're unsure whether you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period, speak with a licensed advisor before delaying enrollment.

4. Not Reviewing Coverage Annually

Medicare plans — and your healthcare needs — can change from year to year.

- **Common Mistake:** Automatically renewing your plan without reviewing the Annual Notice of Changes (ANOC) or comparing other available options.
- **What to Do:** Every year during the AEP, review your ANOC and reassess your plan. Compare coverage, costs, and provider networks to ensure you're still enrolled in the most cost-effective and comprehensive plan for your situation.

5. Focusing Only on Premiums

While lower monthly premiums may seem attractive, they don't tell the whole story.

- **Common Mistake:** Choosing a plan based solely on its premium without factoring in other potential costs — like **deductibles, copayments, or coinsurance**.
- **What to Do:** Look beyond the premium. Estimate your total annual costs based on your expected healthcare usage and consider how different plans manage expenses for the services you use most.



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Final Thoughts: Enroll with Confidence

Understanding the Medicare enrollment process can save you thousands of dollars and ensure access to the healthcare you deserve. Whether you're approaching age 65 or already enrolled, it's worth taking the time to evaluate your options carefully.

Need help comparing plans or understanding your eligibility? As a licensed Medicare advisor, I'm here to guide you every step of the way.

Contact The Potje Team for NO COST guidance you can trust.



Steve and Tammy Potje, Owners



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