

Benefits BUZZ

Benefits tips brought to you by
Insurance Office of America

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Benefit Plan Limits for 2018 Announced

Many employee benefits are subject to annual dollar limits that are periodically increased for inflation. The IRS recently announced cost-of-living adjustments to the annual dollar limits for various welfare and retirement plan limits for 2018. Although some of the limits will remain the same, many of the limits will increase for 2018.

Employers should update their benefit plan designs for the new limits and also make sure that their plan administration will be consistent with the new limits in 2018. Employers may also want to communicate the new benefit plan limits to employees during annual open enrollment.

Health Savings Account 2018 Contribution Limits

- Self-only high deductible health plan (HDHP) coverage—\$3,450
- Family HDHP coverage—\$6,900
- Catch-up contributions*—\$1,000

HDHP 2018 Limits

- Self-only coverage minimum deductible—\$1,350
- Family coverage minimum deductible—\$2,700
- Self-only coverage out-of-pocket maximum (OOPM)—\$6,650
- Family coverage OOPM—\$13,300

Flexible Spending Account (FSA) 2018 Contribution Limits

- Health FSA—\$2,650
- Dependent care FSA*—\$5,000 (\$2,500 if married and filing taxes separately)

401(k) 2018 Contribution Limits

- Employee elective deferrals—\$18,500
- Catch-up contributions—\$6,000

DID YOU KNOW?

According to the annual Kaiser Family Foundation and the Health Research & Educational Trust employer health benefits survey, over half of large employers have embraced telemedicine, with 63 percent offering health care services through this method.

Of these employers, 33 percent offer financial incentives to receive health care services this way, as opposed to an in-person physician visit.

For more information on telemedicine, or to see the survey in full, contact Insurance Office of America today.

Individual Mandate Compliance Policy Reversed

In October, the IRS [reversed](#) a recent policy change in how it monitors compliance with the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate. Individuals should keep the following in mind when filing 2017 tax returns:

- The IRS will not accept electronically filed tax returns where the taxpayer does not certify whether the individual had health insurance for the year.
- Paper returns that do not certify compliance with the individual mandate may be suspended pending receipt of additional information, and any refunds due may be delayed.

To avoid refund and processing delays when filing 2017 individual tax returns in 2018, taxpayers should indicate whether they (and everyone on their return) had health coverage, qualified for an exemption or are paying an individual mandate penalty.



*Not adjusted for inflation

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LIVE WELL WORK WELL



Health and wellness tips for your work and life—
presented by Insurance Office of America (IOA).

Safety First: Holiday Decorations

Although decorative lights are great for getting your home ready for the holidays, they can also present a safety risk if they aren't displayed and maintained properly. Here are a few things to keep in mind to ensure that your home is safe during the holidays:

- When you're buying decorations, always check to see if the product has a label that indicates that it has been independently tested by an organization like Underwriters Laboratories.
- Inspect all lights before you use them. If you notice any damaged cords or plugs, discard those lights immediately. Also, if you need to replace any bulbs, make sure that the lights are unplugged first.
- Use a ladder made of nonconductive materials when you hang lights outside to reduce the risk of electrocution.
- Check to see if your lights were designed for indoor or outdoor use. Although most decorative lights have basic waterproofing, indoor lights can present a serious risk of electrocution or fire if they're used outside.

3 Charitable Giving Ideas for This Holiday Season

For some, the holiday season is synonymous with charitable giving and showing kindness to your friends, family and even strangers. With that season once again upon us, here are three best practices for charitable giving:

1. **Consider what charity you want to help.** Choosing a charity can be a daunting task, but it doesn't have to be. Think about what is important to you. Once you've identified the type of charity you want to help, you can use [GuideStar](#), a website that provides as much information as possible about IRS-registered charities, to find nonprofits that support the causes that are important to you. You can enter in your location as well to find charities that are close to where you live or work.
2. **Conduct a little research before you donate.** Unfortunately, despite the fact that there are numerous charitable organizations, not all of them are as reputable as they may claim. In addition to researching the charity on GuideStar, you can also look up your chosen charity on a website called [Charity Navigator](#) to see how the charity spends its money and uses donations.
3. **Consider how you want to give.** There are many ways for you to donate. Regardless of how you give or how many charities you donate to, you should keep in mind that there are processing costs associated with every donation that you make.

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OLD FASHIONED BREAD PUDDING

5 slices of bread
2 Tbsp. butter
¼ tsp. cinnamon
⅓ cup brown sugar
½ cup raisins
3 large eggs
2 cups nonfat milk
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

PREPARATIONS

1. Heat oven to 350 F. Spray the bottom and sides of a 9-by-9-inch pan.
2. Spread butter on one side of bread slices. Sprinkle slices with cinnamon. Cut bread into 1-inch cubes.
3. Dump bread, sugar and raisins into prepared pan.
4. Blend eggs, milk, salt and vanilla together in a bowl. Pour over bread mixture in pan.
5. Bake uncovered for one hour. Pudding will be done when a table knife inserted in the pudding comes out clean.

Makes: 6 servings

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Total Calories	230
Total Fat	7 g
Protein	8 g
Carbohydrates	36 g
Dietary Fiber	1 g
Saturated Fat	2 g
Sodium	300 mg

Source: USDA



Tips for Sticking to Your Diet During the Holidays

With so many social gatherings during this time, it can be difficult to avoid treating yourself when you're offered good food and drinks. Whether you're dieting or just trying to maintain your healthy lifestyle, fear not—you can survive the holidays and wake up on Jan. 1 without feeling remorse or guilt. Consider the following tips:

- Eat before attending a party so you don't arrive on an empty stomach and devour everything in sight.
- Pace yourself when drinking. Alcohol can be dangerous at holiday parties, as overindulgence cannot only cause embarrassment, but also pack on the pounds.
- Eat slowly. Be mindful of every chew. It takes your body 20 minutes to realize when it is full.
- Don't feel pressure to eat leftovers. If you have an abundance of leftovers after hosting a party, don't feel like you have to eat them just because you don't want them to go to waste.
- Practice self-control. For example, allow yourself one plate of food at a party, and promise yourself that you won't go back for seconds.

Think Before You Drink: Holiday Drinks



Hot Buttered Rum:
418 calories per serving



Brandy Alexander:
246 calories per serving



White Russian:
355 calories per serving



Alcoholic Eggnog:
406 calories per serving

Source: WebMD



Live Well, Work Well

It's never too early to get ready for next year. Plan to buy gifts throughout the year rather than waiting for the holiday rush.

HOLIDAY STRESS: STICKING TO YOUR BUDGET

The holidays can be a stressful time of year, and money is one of the leading causes of holiday anxiety for Americans.

The best time for holiday budgeting begins early in the year, when smart shoppers account for expenses associated with the holiday gift season in their monthly budgets and buy presents here and there throughout the year.

Additionally, resourceful budgeters flock to stores AFTER Christmas to scoop up decorations at bargain bin prices with an eye toward future holidays.

However, if you're like most people, you likely have not planned very far ahead and could find yourself feeling the pinch in January. But don't despair—with proper accounting and a handful of smart shopping ideas, it is possible to find the perfect gift for everyone on your list and stay within your budget.

Here are a few pointers to help you stick to your holiday budget and manage your seasonal financial stress:

- Make a list and check it twice. Review your shopping list carefully. Does everyone listed on it truly need to be there?
- Set limits. Write down a maximum dollar limit for each person, vow to stay within that limit and then track how much you actually spend.
- Shop early. The best window for holiday shopping is between Oct. 1 and Dec. 1. Give yourself time to compare prices and find the best deals. You aren't likely to save money if you wait until the last minute.
- Buy in bulk. Have something on hand for those unexpected presents. A case of wine, elegant candles or a tin of homemade cookies are great ideas.

- Be realistic. Ask yourself if you can really afford to buy gifts—don't feel obligated to buy them if you can't afford them. A good rule of thumb is to leave the credit cards at home, and if you don't have the cash for it, don't buy it. Also be sure to avoid store-specific credit cards, which can charge exorbitantly high interest rates.
- Talk to your friends and family about scaling back. Ask about doing a gift exchange instead of buying gifts for everyone. If you find these things too embarrassing or unworkable consider going the homemade gift route.
- Shop online. Some of the best bargains won't be found in stores. Many retailers will waive shipping costs during the holidays. Plus, why spend the days before your holiday celebrations wasting gas and battling crowds for items that may not be in stock?
- Get a holiday job. Even with a good budget, the extra holiday shopping can pinch the pocketbook. Consider working a seasonal job.

