

Have You Reached the Donut Hole in Your Medicare Drug Plan?

Several Medicare prescription drug plans have a gap in coverage, sometimes referred to as a “donut hole.” In 2010, after you have accumulated \$2,830 in total covered drug costs (what you and the plan have paid), you pay 100% of your covered drug costs until you have spent \$4,550 out-of-pocket. After that, you will have “catastrophic coverage,” where you will pay only 5% of your covered drug costs for the rest of the calendar year.

What Are My Options During the Gap?

1. Keep using your Medicare prescription drug card.

- Plan prices are generally lower than retail cost.
- The money you spend will count toward the \$4,550 you need to spend in order to receive catastrophic coverage benefits.

2. Switch to generic or less expensive brand-name drugs.

- Contact your doctor to see if you can change to a generic. This could reduce your co-payments and help maximize savings.
- You may be able to lower your costs if your doctor will prescribe double your dosage, (e.g. 20mg instead of 10mg), and you cut the tablet in half. You will only need to purchase 15 pills a month instead of 30. It is very important to check with your doctor as this cannot be done with all medications.

3. Try to avoid reaching the gap.

- You can ask if your pharmacist will not apply certain drugs to your Part D card.
- Check into purchasing generic drugs through low cost programs available at some chain stores such as Wal-Mart, Target and K-mart. To avoid using multiple pharmacies, ask if your pharmacy will match these programs.

4. Explore other available assistance.

- Contact the Social Security Administration to see if you qualify for extra help in paying for your prescription drug plan.
- Look into Patient Assistance Programs. Many of the major drug companies offer assistance programs. You can find out if assistance is available for the drugs you take by going to www.medicare.gov and select “Lower Your Costs During the Coverage Gap”. Then click on **Pharmaceutical Assistance Program**.
- Ask your doctor about free samples for your prescription.

5. Review your current plan and do a comparison to determine if you should change to a plan that provides coverage in the gap the next time you enroll. SHIP can help.

- Plan ahead for the gap. A comparison will give you an estimate of your yearly costs including what month you will reach the gap. Divide your costs by 12 and set aside enough money to cover your costs when you reach the gap.

For more information, contact the Iowa Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIP) at 1-800-351-4664.

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