April 2026

How to take your pension

A step-by-step guide

- Start planning at least 10 years before accessing your pension.
- Compare the options for taking your pension.
- Get free and impartial guidance.
- Find a regulated financial adviser for personalised advice.

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HM Government

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Whatever your circumstances, MoneyHelper is on your side. Online and over the phone, we offer clear and impartial guidance that's quick to find, easy to use and backed by government. We can also point you to trusted services if you need more support.

We can help you:

- deal with debt
- understand your pension options
- reduce your spending and build up savings
- navigate life events such as redundancy, relationship breakdown, retirement or bereavement
- budget for bills or major purchases
- learn about mortgages and renting
- find out about extra benefits and entitlements.

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From

Money & Pensions Service

Who this guide is for

This guide explains how you can take your pension if you:

- live in the UK, and
- have a UK-based **defined contribution** pension – most recent pensions are this type unless you work in the public sector, like education, the NHS or the Armed Forces.

This guide **does not cover**:

- **defined benefit** pensions – often called final salary or career average schemes and typical in the public sector
- **collective defined contribution** pensions – Royal Mail currently has the only authorised scheme in the UK.

If you have these pension types, you can find free help on **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensions** or contact us using the details on the back cover.

If your pension is based overseas or you live outside the UK (or you plan to), regulated cross-border financial advice will help you understand your options instead (see page 27).

Not sure what type of pension you have?

You can ask your pension provider to confirm or go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-type** to use our free tool.

Start planning around 10 years before taking your pension

It's a good idea to start planning how and when to take your pension at least 10 years before you'd like to access it.

This is because you might benefit by making changes early, including changing how much you save and how your pension is invested. This guide explains the actions you can take and when.

Get a free appointment to explain your pension options

As well as this guide, we also offer free Pension Wise appointments to explain how and when you can take your pension. You can either:

- start online at any time
- book a date and time with one of our pension specialists.

To get your free appointment, see page 25 or go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise**

After an appointment, 94% of our customers are satisfied and 93% recommend Pension Wise to others.

Get personalised advice from a financial adviser

This guide explains your options to help you work out what's right for you. For tailored advice or product recommendations, you'll need to pay for regulated financial advice.

People who receive financial advice typically build more wealth than those who don't over the long term, even after fees are taken into account. This is based on research by the International Longevity Centre.

To find out more, see page 27 or go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-advice**

How to take your pension: step by step

Step 1: Understand how your pension works

Start by learning how your pension works and making sure you know where all your pensions are.

How defined contribution pensions work

A defined contribution pension builds up a ‘pot’ of money to pay you a retirement income. They’re sometimes called money purchase pensions.

The amount of money in your pension pot when you retire will depend on:

- how much is paid in
- how long you save for
- how well your invested money performs
- the pension provider’s charges and fees.

Your pension is an investment, so the value of your pension can rise or fall – but it should grow over time. The longer you save for, the more time your money has to grow.

You can usually choose how to take your money, including as a guaranteed regular income or multiple lump sums when you need them. This guide explains all your options.

Gather information about all your pension schemes

How and when you can take your pension will depend on your pension scheme’s rules, features and the options they offer for taking money. These can vary between schemes.

It’s a good idea to:

- gather any information your provider has sent you
- make sure you have an up-to-date statement or log in to your provider’s online account to view your latest estimate
- ask your provider to answer any questions you have about your scheme.

Find old or lost pensions

If you've lost touch with a pension provider, they will not know how to pay you when you retire. This means you could miss out on retirement income that you're entitled to.

If you cannot find details for a pension scheme, the Pension Tracing Service can help you find their contact details.

You can:

- go to **gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details**
- call 0800 731 0175 or +44 191 218 7777 if you're outside the UK.

Lines are open 10am to 3pm UK time, Monday to Friday.

For step-by-step help, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/find-lost-pensions**

You can also contact us for help using the details on the back cover.

Step 2: Check the age you can take your pension

The earliest you can take money from your pension is usually age 55. This is called the normal minimum pension age (NMPA).

But you might be able to take your pension before age 55 if:

- you need to retire early due to poor health, or
- your pension scheme lists a younger age, often called a protected pension age.

From 6 April 2028, the normal minimum pension age rises to age 57

If you're 55 or 56 on this date, you might lose access to your pension until you turn 57 – even if you've already taken money. Your pension provider will be able to explain the rules that apply to you.

You'll usually get less if you take your pension early

Most pensions are designed to pay out at either:

- your normal pension age (NPA) – when your provider expects you to retire
- a selected retirement date (SRD) – if you've told your pension provider a different date.

This means you'll usually get less if you take your pension before your normal pension age or selected retirement date, as there's less time to build up a pot of money.

You can find your normal pension age in your scheme documents or by asking your provider. It varies between schemes, but is often around age 60, 65 or the same as your State Pension age.

Your State Pension age is the earliest you can claim your State Pension. To check yours, go to **gov.uk/state-pension-age**

Scammers might offer to access your pension before age 55

If you receive a cold call, text, email or visit telling you that you can access your pension earlier than age 55, it's likely a scam.

Do not give them any information or try and take money from your pension. You could lose your money and face a large tax bill.

If you're worried about scams, you can call our financial crimes and scams unit on 0800 011 3797.

Lines are open 9am to 5pm UK time, Monday to Friday. Closed on bank holidays.

Step 3: Check your estimated pension income

Deciding when to retire often depends on when you can afford to stop working.

You can usually find an estimate of your pension income by:

- logging in to your provider's online account
- checking pension statements you've received
- contacting your provider.

Check how your estimated pension income has been worked out

Always check how your estimated pension income has been worked out. Many providers base it on:

- the income starting when you reach your scheme's normal pension age (NPA)
- you converting all the money into a guaranteed regular income, which is called buying an annuity.

This means you might get a different amount if you:

- take your money before or after your normal pension age
- want to take your money in a different way than buying an annuity.

Your pension can rise and fall in value

Your pension provider can only estimate how much you'll get – they usually cannot give you an exact figure until you start taking your pension.

This is because the amount your pension will pay depends on:

- how much is paid in
- how long you save for
- how you choose to take your money
- how well your invested money has performed
- the charges you pay.

Check if your total retirement income will cover all your costs

To help work out if your pension income is enough to give you a comfortable retirement, it's a good idea to:

1. Add up all the retirement income you plan to have, including the State Pension.
2. List all the costs you're likely to still have, including household bills and mortgage or rent.
3. Compare the 2 figures to see how much money you have left over – if any.

To help work out your total pension income, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-calculator**

Check for ways to boost your pension

There are many ways you can increase your retirement income, including:

- paying more into your pension – your employer might match your contributions
- checking you're getting all the tax relief you're eligible for – it's not always automatic if you're a higher-rate taxpayer
- plugging gaps in your National Insurance record to make sure you're on track for the maximum State Pension.

For more information, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/boost-pension**

To check how much State Pension you're on track to get and potential ways to boost it, you can:

- go to **gov.uk/check-state-pension**
- call the Future Pension centre on 0800 731 0175 or +44 191 218 3600 if you're outside the UK.

Lines are open 8am to 6pm UK time, Monday to Friday.

Review the rest of your finances

Take time to look at all your finances, including how you might:

- pay off any debts before you retire, such as a mortgage
- set up a power of attorney so someone you trust can manage your health and finances if you're unable to
- make or update your will
- update your expression of wish form, which tells your pension provider who you'd like to inherit your pension or death benefits.

Step 4: Compare the options for taking your pension

Defined contribution pensions build up a pot of money for you to use in retirement. This means you can choose how and when you'd like to use it.

Your options – at a glance

You usually have 6 options to choose from:

1. **Delay taking your pension** until you need it.
2. **Take flexible income** as and when you need it, while the rest stays invested – called pension drawdown.
3. **Get a guaranteed regular income** by buying an annuity.
4. **Take multiple lump sums** as and when you need them.
5. **Take your pension in one payment**.
6. **Combine these options**. For example, you could use pension drawdown to take income when you need it for a few years and buy an annuity at a later date.

How each option is taxed

If you use **pension drawdown** or buy an **annuity**, you can usually choose to take up to 25% of your pension as a tax-free lump sum beforehand. Remember, the more you take now, the less you'll have to give you an income later. After this, the income you get from pension drawdown or an annuity is taxed based on normal Income Tax rules.

If you take your pension as **one or more lump sums**, up to 25% of each amount withdrawn is paid tax-free. The rest is taxed based on normal Income Tax rules. There's a maximum amount you can take tax-free from your pensions, called the lump sum allowance (LSA). For most people this is £268,275.

Get free and impartial guidance on your options

With so many options for taking your pension, it can be hard to know which one is right.

A free Pension Wise appointment lets you speak to one of our pension specialists or explore your options online at your own pace. Go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** or see page 25.

Option 1: Delay taking your pension

You do not have to start taking money from your pension when you reach your scheme's normal pension age (NPA) or selected retirement date (SRD). You can leave your money invested in your pot until you need it – many schemes will let you delay taking your pension up to age 75.

This can mean your pension has longer to stay invested and potentially grow, tax-free. It might also give you a higher income when you do take it, as it will pay out over a shorter period.

But some schemes have penalties if you do not take the money by a certain date. So **always tell your provider if you're considering delaying taking your pension**.

Option 2: Take flexible income as and when you need it (pension drawdown)

Pension drawdown lets you access some of your pension money while leaving the rest invested. You can decide how much to take out and when, which could be a regular income or lump sums as and when you need them.

You can either choose to move your pension into drawdown:

- in one go, or
- gradually over time – called phased or partial drawdown.

When you put all or part of your pension into drawdown, you can choose to take up to 25% of that amount tax-free. While your money is invested, the value of your pension can still rise and fall until you take it out.

Option 3: Get a guaranteed regular income (an annuity)

You can use some or all of your pension to buy an annuity to give you a guaranteed regular income, either for:

- the rest of your life – called a lifetime annuity
- an agreed period between 1 and 40 years – called a fixed-term annuity.

How much an annuity will pay depends on many factors, including your age, health and the annuity rates at the time.

To see how much retirement income you could get from an annuity:

- go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/guaranteed-income**
- check if your pension scheme offers guaranteed annuity rates – these might be better than you can get from other providers.

When buying an annuity, you can normally choose to:

- use all the money in your pension pot without taking any as a tax-free lump sum
- take up to 25% as tax-free lump sum first and either:
  - use the rest to buy an annuity
  - use some to buy an annuity and keep some invested
  - keep the rest invested and buy an annuity at a later date.

Remember, you **do not have to take the full 25% as a tax-free lump sum**. The more you take, the less you'll have to give you an income.

If you buy an annuity using a pension you've already taken money from, you usually cannot take a tax-free lump sum beforehand – unless you've only taken a UFPLS (see option 4). This is still the case if you chose not to take a tax-free lump sum when you first accessed that pension.

If you choose to buy an annuity, you typically cannot change your mind after the cooling-off period has ended.

Option 4: Take your pension as multiple lump sums

You can leave all your pension invested and take money from your pension as and when you need it. Up to 25% of each lump sum you take is tax-free and the rest is taxed along with any other earnings.

As your money is still invested, the value of your pension can still rise and fall until you take it out. This option is called Uncrystallised Funds Pension Lump Sum (UFPLS).

Option 5: Take your pension in one payment

You can take all the money in your pension in one payment, so none of it stays invested. Up to 25% is paid tax-free and the rest is taxed along with any other earnings.

This means **you might pay more Income Tax on the money than other options**, as it would be paid in one tax year and might push you into a higher tax band.

Option 6: Combine these options

You can usually choose more than one way to take your pension. Some providers also offer products that mix 2 or more options.

For example, you could:

1. Take a tax-free lump sum at age 60.
2. Keep the rest invested.
3. Take income and/or lump sums as and when you need them.
4. Convert what's left into a guaranteed regular income at age 65.

If you have multiple defined contribution pensions, you can choose different options for each. For example, you could convert one into a guaranteed regular income and leave the other one invested until you want to take lump sums.

Your pension income might be claimed to repay debts

Any money held in your pension usually cannot be claimed by anyone you owe money to, even if you're declared bankrupt or have a formal debt repayment plan.

But if you take money out of your pension, you might be told to use it to make regular repayments or the whole amount could be claimed.

If you're worried about debt, talk to a free debt adviser before taking your pension.

You can:

- go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/debt** to find free debt advice near you
- call us on 0800 011 3797 or +44 20 7932 5780 if you're outside the UK.

Lines are open 9am to 5pm UK time, Monday to Friday. Closed on bank holidays.

Step 5: Consider which options match your plans

To help work out which options might match your retirement plans – and when you might start taking your pension – here are some key questions to consider.

A free Pension Wise appointment will also help you answer these questions. Go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** or see page 25.

Which options does my pension provider offer?

Some providers might not offer all the options, or they may have certain restrictions or conditions. Your provider will be able to tell you what's available to you.

You can then compare this to what other providers can offer you, as you could transfer your pension to a different provider to get a better deal. Find out more at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-transfers**

Does my pension scheme have any valuable special features?

Some pensions include valuable special features that might be lost if you take money too early, too late or transfer to another provider. This can affect how much you get and your options for taking money.

Special features include:

- guaranteed annuity rates that can give a higher income than other providers
- a with-profits bonus – extra money if you take your pension before or after a certain date
- protected tax-free cash – this can let you take more than 25% of your pension as a tax-free lump sum.

Find out more at **moneyhelper.org.uk/special-features**

How will I make sure the money lasts?

A lifetime annuity will give you a guaranteed regular income, so you know how much you'll get for the rest of your life. This might not give you the highest possible income, but it does give you certainty.

All the other options mean you'll need to plan how you'll make sure the money lasts for your entire retirement, which could last for over 20 years.

If you keep some or all of your pension invested, its value can rise and fall until you take the money. This means the amount you can take out might be higher or lower than expected.

How much your pension is worth depends on how much is paid in, how well the investments perform and the charges your provider takes off.

How much tax will I pay?

You can usually take up to 25% from each of your pensions without paying Income Tax, as long as you take it in one or more lump sums and the total amount is less than the lump sum allowance. The lump sum allowance is £268,275 for most people. This means you can only take up to this amount tax-free, even if 25% of all your pensions is worth more.

The rest, or any taken as regular pension income, is added to any other earnings you have to work out how much Income Tax you'll pay each tax year (6 April to 5 April). This includes the State Pension.

To see the latest Income Tax rates and allowances in:

- England, Wales and Northern Ireland, go to **gov.uk/income-tax-rates**
- Scotland, go to **gov.uk/scottish-income-tax**

If you take money from your pension when you need it (either using pension drawdown or as multiple lump sums), this means you might be able to spread how much you take across different tax years to avoid moving into a higher Income Tax band.

Example: If you live in England and your total income is £50,000, taking £5,000 from your pension in the same tax year would push you into a higher tax band. But wait until a new tax year starts and you might pay less tax by staying in a lower tax band – depending on your total earnings for that tax year.

Income Tax is usually calculated and paid by your pension provider before they pay you any money. Your provider uses your tax code to work out how much tax you'll pay.

Can I continue paying into a pension?

All options let you continue paying into a pension, but you might get less tax relief.

Tax relief is a top-up payment added by the government when you pay into a pension before age 75. This is the money you'd normally pay in Income Tax.

You can usually get tax relief on all your pension contributions up to the annual allowance. For most people, this means both:

- your contributions must be less than – or equal to – the amount you earn (if you earn less than £3,600, you can get tax relief on contributions up to £2,880), and

- all payments in must be less than £60,000 – including contributions from you, your employer and tax relief.

But if you take taxable money from your defined contribution pension, the £60,000 annual allowance usually reduces to £10,000. This is called the money purchase annual allowance (MPAA).

This means all the options for taking your pension will usually trigger the MPAA, unless you:

- only take up to 25% of your pension as a tax-free cash lump sum and:
  - leave the rest invested in pension drawdown, or
  - use the rest to buy a guaranteed regular income from a lifetime annuity
- take an entire pension in one go that's worth £10,000 or less and you ask your provider to use the small pot rules.

Small pot rules let you take your entire pension as one lump sum with 25% paid tax-free, without reducing your annual allowance or lump sum allowance.

If you've taken a tax-free lump sum, you might also have to pay extra tax if you put some or all of it into a different pension scheme.

This is because pension recycling rules stop you from taking tax-free cash out of a pension and then paying it back in, in order to get more tax relief. If you do this, you usually have to pay 55% of the amount you received as a tax-free lump sum in tax.

Will my pension income affect my entitlement to benefits?

If taking money from your pension increases your income or savings, this might affect any benefits you're entitled to claim.

You can:

- go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/benefits-calculator** to check what you're entitled to and how it might change if your income or savings increased
- speak to the office that pays your benefit
- find free and confidential benefits advice on **advicelocal.uk**

Will I need to change how my pension is invested?

Many pension providers manage and choose the investments for you, typically putting your money into their default fund – often a lifestyle or target date fund.

This usually means your money is moved away from higher risk stock market funds the closer you get to your scheme's normal pension age or your selected retirement date. This happens as your provider assumes you'll take all your pension money at that point, leaving none invested.

If you want to leave any of your pension invested past this point (such as pension drawdown, taking multiple lump sums or retiring later), this means you might miss out on investment growth by keeping your money in your provider's default fund.

Your pension provider will usually offer a range of other funds you can choose between, including the option to spread your money over a number of funds. You could also consider paying a financial adviser for advice on how to invest your money (see page 27).

If you decide to put your pension into drawdown, you also have the option of choosing an investment pathway. This is a ready-made investment that links to your retirement plans and preferences. To compare investment pathways, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-drawdown-calculator**

To find out more, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-investments**

What happens to my pension after I die?

Until 6 April 2027, any money left in your pension will not be counted for Inheritance Tax purposes. But your beneficiaries might pay Income Tax when they receive the money, depending on how old you are when you die.

If you die before age 75, any money left in your defined contribution pension can usually be inherited tax-free as long as:

- the money is paid to your nominated beneficiaries within two years of your pension provider being aware of your death
- you did not transfer your pension in the two years before you died if you were in ill-health – this might be seen as a transfer of value and subject to Inheritance Tax
- the total amount inherited from all your pensions and taken as lump sums is not higher than the lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA).

The LSDBA is £1,073,100 for most people. It counts all tax-free lump sums taken from your pension. This means your limit might be lower if you've already taken tax-free money. Your beneficiaries will usually pay Income Tax on any amounts above the allowance.

In all other cases, including if you die after age 75, your pension usually cannot be inherited tax-free. The inherited amount is normally added to your beneficiaries' other income to calculate how much Income Tax is due.

From April 2027, any money left in your pension might be counted when calculating Inheritance Tax.

For more information, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/death-and-taxes**

What happens to an annuity after I die?

An annuity will usually stop paying when you die, unless:

- you take out a joint-life annuity – this pays a portion of your income to your dependants after you die, and/or
- you add one or more optional protections:
  - **value protection** – this pays your beneficiaries a lump sum if your annuity has paid out less than it cost you when you die
  - **a guarantee period** – this pays your beneficiaries an income for up to 30 years after you die, or a lump sum of that value
  - **'with proportion'** – this pays your beneficiaries a lump sum for the period between your last payment date and the day you died.

For example, if you had value protection on a £50,000 annuity and only received £30,000 in income from it when you died, your beneficiary would receive £20,000.

If you had a guarantee period for 10 years and died after 7 years, your beneficiaries would either receive the remaining 3 years as a lump sum or as regular income.

If you had 'with proportion' and died 10 days after your annuity had last paid out, your beneficiary would receive a payment for the annuity income payable for those 10 days.

You'll typically get a lower income if you add optional protections

You'll need to choose any optional protections when you first take out the annuity. You'll usually get a lower income for each protection you add on as it's more likely the income will pay out for longer.

If you choose a guarantee period and a joint-life annuity, you can normally choose for the payments to your beneficiaries to pay out:

- at the same time, called overlap
- after the guarantee period has ended, called without overlap.

Just be aware that you might not always benefit from adding protections. For example:

- a joint-life policy will not pay out if your dependant dies before you
- your annuity will still stop if you die after a guarantee period has ended.

Step 6: Shop around to find the best deal

You do not need to stick with your current pension provider to start taking your money. Always check if you can get a better deal from a different provider.

Try to start shopping around at least 6 months before you want to take your money.

Check your current provider's deals

Start by checking what you could get by staying with your existing pension provider, including:

- if your provider offers the option you'd like
- how much income or investment growth you could get – you can usually ask them for quotes
- if there are any penalties for transferring to a different provider, like an exit fee
- if you have any special features, such as
  - guaranteed annuity rates – this might let you convert your pension into a higher guaranteed regular income than you could get elsewhere
  - a protected pension age – this might let you access your pension earlier than other schemes could
  - a 'with-profits' bonus – this is an extra payment you might get if you wait to access your pension after a certain age.

Compare pension plans and providers to find the best deal

Next, check if you can get a better deal from a different provider. How to compare depends on the way you'd like to take your money.

How to compare pension drawdown providers

To find drawdown providers that offer different ways to take your money and ready-made investment options, you can:

- go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-drawdown-calculator** to use our impartial comparison tool
- manually search for pension providers that offer drawdown
- pay a financial adviser to recommend a product for you (see page 27).

When comparing, make sure to check:

- if the provider offers the way you'd like to take your money
- how your money would be invested
- if you can choose your own pension investment options
- what you'd need to pay – including an annual management fee and charges each time you take money.

If a new provider offers a better deal, consider transferring your pension. But always check if you'll lose any benefits before switching away. Find out more at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-transfers**

How to compare annuity providers

To see what different providers will offer, you can:

- go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/guaranteed-income** to use our impartial annuity comparison tool
- get quotes by contacting different annuity providers yourself – many insurance companies and pension providers sell annuities
- pay a financial adviser to recommend a product for you – advisers might be able to access better annuity rates than are available to you directly (see page 27).

How much income you can get depends on the annuity rate you're offered. For example, if you converted a £100,000 pension pot, an annuity rate of 5% would give you an annual income of £5,000.

Annuity rates depend on many factors, including:

- your age and health – you might qualify for higher rates if you have poor health or a medical condition
- how long you'd like the income to last for
- if you'd like a lump sum (a maturity value) at the end of any fixed period
- the options you choose, including:
  - income that increases or stays the same each year
  - if your annuity will continue paying out to someone else after you die.

Annuities that continue paying after you die, such as a joint annuity or one with a 'guarantee period' or 'value protection', usually help support your living dependants.

To find out more about your options, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/annuities**

How to compare providers that allow multiple lump sums

Comparison sites for pension providers do not exist, so you'll usually either need to:

- manually search for pension providers that allow multiple lump sums
- pay a regulated financial adviser to recommend a provider and product for you (see page 27).

Always check for any restrictions as some providers might:

- charge a fee every time you take a lump sum
- limit how much you can take each time.

If a new provider offers a better deal, consider transferring your pension. But always check if you'll lose any benefits before switching away. Find out more at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-transfers**

How to compare providers that allow a single payment

If you want to take your pension in one go and your existing provider allows this with no penalties, there's usually no need to compare other providers.

If your existing provider does not let you or has penalties, you can:

- manually search for pension providers that allow you to withdraw in one go
- pay a regulated financial adviser to recommend a provider and product for you (see page 27).

Always check any provider is authorised

Scammers might try and target you by creating adverts or contacting you promising high returns or early access to your pension. They might also have professional-looking websites.

To help protect you, go to **fca.org.uk/firm-checker** to make sure any provider you're looking at is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Step 7: Start taking your pension when you're ready

When you're ready to start taking your pension, you'll need to contact your pension provider and tell them what you'd like to do.

This might include transferring your pension to a different provider if they do not offer the option you'd like.

Never access your pension if you feel pressured or unsure

Do not access your pension or transfer any money to a pension provider because of a cold call, visit, email or text. It's likely a scam designed to steal your money.

You might lose all your retirement savings and have to pay an expensive tax bill.

If you think you're being targeted or have already signed something you're now unsure about:

- contact your pension provider and ask them not to transfer any money
- report the potential scam:
  - in England, Wales or Northern Ireland at **reportfraud.police.uk** or call 0300 123 2040
  - in Scotland to Police Scotland by calling 101.

If you've lost money, you can:

- call our financial crime and scams unit on 0800 011 3797
- book a pension loss appointment by emailing **virtual.appointments@moneyhelper.org.uk**

Our lines are open 9am to 5pm UK time, Monday to Friday (closed on bank holidays).

Check you're paying the right amount of tax

When your pension is first paid, a temporary or emergency tax code might be used. This can mean the incorrect amount of tax is taken off.

If you think you've overpaid tax, go to **gov.uk/claim-tax-refund** or call 0300 200 3300. Lines are open 8am to 6pm UK time, Monday to Friday (closed on bank holidays).

HMRC might also pay it back to you automatically at the end of the tax year.

Regularly check the value of any pension that remains invested

If any part of your pension remains invested, its value can rise and fall in value until you take the money. This means it's important to regularly check how well it's performing.

If your pension grows at a slower rate than expected, you might want to consider:

- lowering the amount you're planning to take each time
- choosing a different way of taking your money
- changing how your pension is invested.

It's also worth comparing pension providers at least once a year to see if you might be better off transferring your pension elsewhere.

Claim your State Pension

Your State Pension is not paid automatically, you need to claim it.

Around 4 months before you reach your State Pension age, you should receive an invitation code by post. If you've not received it 3 months before this, or you've lost it, go to **get-state-pension.service.gov.uk/request-invitation-code**.

You can then use your invitation code to apply when you're ready – there's no time limit. You might get more money in your State Pension if you delay your claim.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales

You can apply for your State Pension:

- online at **gov.uk/get-state-pension**
- by calling 0800 731 7898.

Lines are open 8am to 6pm UK time, Monday to Friday (closed on bank holidays).

If you live in Northern Ireland

You can apply for your State Pension:

- online at **nidirect.gov.uk/services/get-your-state-pension**
- by calling 0808 100 2658.

Lines are open 9am to 4pm UK time, Monday to Friday.

Check if you can claim Pension Credit

If you have a low income, Pension Credit might top it up depending on your circumstances.

Claiming Pension Credit also means you'll be entitled to other help, such as a free TV licence and discounts on your bills. This could make you better off by thousands of pounds a year.

Go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/benefits-calculator** to see what you're entitled to or call the Pension Credit helpline.

If you live in England, Scotland or Wales, call 0800 99 1234.

Lines are open 8am to 6pm UK time, Monday to Friday.

If you live in Northern Ireland, call 0808 100 6165.

Lines are open 9am to 4pm UK time, Monday to Friday.

Have a free Pension Wise appointment for impartial guidance

A free Pension Wise appointment works alongside this guide to explain the options for taking your defined contribution pension. It's impartial and backed by government.

What an appointment covers

You'll find out:

- when you can access your pension pots
- the different ways you can take money from your pension
- how each option is usually taxed
- how to spot and avoid scams
- what happens to your pension when you die.

After your appointment, you'll get a list of next steps you can take. We cannot recommend specific products or give advice on what's best for you to do.

Who is eligible

You can get an appointment if you have a UK-based defined contribution pension and are:

- 50 or over
- under 50 and:
  - have inherited someone else's pension
  - are retiring early due to poor health, or
  - your scheme lets you take your pension before age 55.

It does not matter how much your pension is worth.

94% of our customers are satisfied with their appointment

93% recommend Pension Wise to others

How to have an appointment

You can:

- have an online appointment at any time
- book a date and time to speak to one of our pension specialists
- have more than one appointment if you'd like.

Go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** or call to book on 0800 011 3797. If you're outside the UK, call +44 20 7932 5780.

We're open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm UK time. Closed on bank holidays.

How to prepare for your appointment

So we can understand your plans for retirement, we'll usually ask you about your pensions and other finances.

You'll usually benefit more from a Pension Wise appointment if, before your appointment, you:

1. Ask each of your pension providers:
    - how much your pension is currently worth
    - if your pension has any special features, like a guaranteed pot value or annuity rate.
2. Check your State Pension forecast, either:
    - online at **gov.uk/check-state-pension**
    - by calling 0800 731 0175 or +44 191 218 3600 if you're outside the UK. Lines are open 8am to 6pm UK time, Monday to Friday.
3. Have details of your other finances, like:
    - savings and investments
    - debts and repayments – such as a mortgage and loans.
4. Think about your plans for retirement, such as:
    - when you'd like to stop working
    - what type of pension income you'd like.

Consider paying for regulated financial advice

A regulated financial adviser can help you decide what's best for you and your money, including when and how to access your pension. This might mean you have more money in the long run.

A good financial adviser will:

- give you a free initial meeting to discuss your needs
- provide you with a tailored plan that fits your circumstances and goals
- recommend suitable products and services
- help you avoid expensive mistakes
- make sure you take advantage of opportunities, such as tax allowances.

Independent and restricted financial advisers

There are two main types of financial adviser:

- **Independent financial advisers (IFAs)** can search the entire market to recommend a product or service for you, including all types of investments.
- **Restricted advisers** usually give advice on a specific type of product or area (such as retirement) and/or recommend products from a certain number of providers.

Both types of advice will be tailored to you, so the quality of advice will not be affected.

How to search for a regulated financial adviser

Online directories let you search for regulated financial advisers and filter by location, advice type and contact method. These include:

- **vouchedfor.co.uk**
- **unbiased.co.uk**
- **societyoflaterlifeadvisers.co.uk**
- **thepfs.org** (Personal Finance Society).

You could also:

- ask for personal recommendations if someone you trust has already paid for advice
- check if your employer, trade union or other organisation you're a member of has special arrangements with advisory firms.

To check the adviser (or the firm they work for) is authorised to provide advice, use the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA's) Financial Services Register at **register.fca.org.uk**

This will also list their genuine contact details.

For more help finding financial advice, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-advice**

You must be told how much the advice will cost before you commit

The cost of financial advice and how you're charged can vary, so it's always best to get multiple quotes from different advisers or firms.

An adviser might charge:

- an hourly rate
- a fixed fee for a one-off review or plan
- a fee based on the value or your pension or investment portfolio.

Before you commit to an adviser, they must tell you:

- how their charges work
- how much you'll pay
- if there are ongoing costs, like fees for managing your pensions or investments in the long term.

Check if your pension provider lets you use the pensions advice allowance

The pensions advice allowance lets you take up to £500 tax-free from your pension to pay for retirement advice. You can do this once per tax year (6 April to 5 April), up to 3 times in total.

If you get bad advice, you can complain and ask for compensation

Using a regulated financial adviser means you can complain and ask for compensation if the advice you were given turns out to be unsuitable.

You cannot complain if your investments have not performed as you'd hoped, unless you were told they were low risk and they turned out to be high risk – for example.

Unsuitable advice might include:

- being told wrong or misleading information
- your agreed recommendations not being carried out – or later than promised
- mistakes being made.

When complaining, it's a good idea to include a copy of the written recommendations your adviser sent you and explain why you feel the advice was unsuitable.

For step-by-step help, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/claim-compensation**

Never take advice because of a cold call, email or text

A fraudster might target you by offering fast or high financial returns – often pressuring you to act quickly. This might be via an advert on social media or by calling, emailing or texting you.

Never make any payments or access any of your investments or pensions because of this type of contact. It's likely a scam and you could lose your money and face a large tax charge.

Useful contacts

MoneyHelper

MoneyHelper is independent and backed by government to help you make the most of your money. We give free, impartial money and pensions guidance to everyone across the UK – online and over the phone.

Visit us at **moneyhelper.org.uk**

Or contact us via:

Phone

Money and pensions guidance
UK: **0800 011 3797**
If you're outside the UK:**+44 20 7932 5780**
Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm

Online

moneyhelper.org.uk/contact

Online communities

Join our Facebook groups for support: **moneyhelper.org.uk/online-communities**

Find a financial adviser

A regulated financial adviser can help you plan for retirement.

For help finding a pension or retirement adviser, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-advice**

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)

To check the FCA Register or to report misleading financial adverts or other promotions.

Consumer helpline: 0800 111 6768
Typetalk: 1800 10207 066 1000
fca.org.uk/register

Pension information and guidance

For details of your workplace pension scheme, talk to your pensions administrator, pensions manager or pension trustees at work.

Pension Wise

A free Pension Wise appointment explains the options for taking money from your defined contribution pension. It's impartial and backed by government.

You can have an appointment if you have a UK-based defined contribution pension and are:

- 50 or over
- under 50 and:
  - have inherited someone else's pension
  - are retiring early due to poor health, or
  - your scheme lets you take your pension before age 55.

Go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** or call 0800 011 3797 between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Closed on bank holidays.

GOV.UK

State Pension statements and enquiries
0800 731 0175
gov.uk/check-state-pension

The Pension Tracing Service
0800 731 0175
gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details

Complaints and compensation

Financial Ombudsman Service

0800 023 4567 or 0300 123 9123
financial-ombudsman.org.uk

The Pensions Ombudsman

For complaints about a workplace pension scheme or a personal pension.
0800 917 4487
pensions-ombudsman.org.uk

Use this page to record your notes

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This guide is produced by MoneyHelper and is also available in Welsh. To see our full range of guides and request copies visit **moneyhelper.org.uk/free-printed-guides**

Cymraeg

Contact us

Money and pensions guidance **0800 011 3797**
Mon – Fri 9am to 5pm

Relay UK **18001 0800 011 3797**
Mon – Fri 9am to 5pm

Online **moneyhelper.org.uk/contact**

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moneyhelper.org.uk/feedback

Money Helper

Plain Numbers
Clear. Fair. Never misleading.

Calls from the UK are free. To help us maintain and improve our service, we may record or monitor calls.

Accessible formats
If you would like this guide in Braille, large print or audio format please contact us on the above numbers. Information correct at time of printing (April 2026). These guides are reviewed once a year.

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