Your pension: your choices

- Thinking about accessing your pension pot?
- Deciding how to take your retirement income?
- Shopping around for the best income?

MoneyHelper

HM Government

Making your money and pension choices clearer

Whatever your circumstances, MoneyHelper is on your side. Online and over the phone, we offer clear 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:

- clear your debts
- understand your pension options
- plan for retirement
- reduce your spending and build up savings
- navigate life events such as redundancy, relationship breakdown or bereavement
- plan ahead for major purchases
- find out about extra benefits and entitlements.

Just search for MoneyHelper: **moneyhelper.org.uk**

Free impartial guidance
on the web | on the phone

Provided by

Money & Pensions Service

Who should read this guide?

This guide is for you if you're a UK resident and are planning to access a pension pot built up from contributions into a personal or workplace pension known as a defined contribution or money purchase pension scheme in the UK.

If you're not resident in the UK, planning to move outside the UK or have a pension(s) built up outside the UK, you should seek regulated cross-border financial advice regarding your options. If you live overseas with a UK pension pot, you may be eligible for a Pension Wise appointment which will explain things to keep in mind (see page 4).

This guide sets out your options for using your pot(s) to provide a retirement income and the benefits and any potential risks of the different choices.

It also tells you about key actions you need to take as you approach the time you want to access your pension pot (whether you are retiring or not) and how to access free guidance from Pension Wise – an impartial service backed by government that will help you weigh up your options for taking your pension.

However, the guide doesn't cover workplace pension schemes where the pension you get is worked out as a proportion of your pay. These schemes are known as 'defined benefit', 'final salary' or 'career average' schemes. If you have this type of pension scheme and you need some help, you can speak to your pension scheme administrator or your employer. Or, you can call us for free and impartial pensions guidance on 0800 011 3797.

Beware of scams

As you approach retirement, beware of firms claiming to be approved financial advisers or trying to persuade you to take money out of your pension early. Find out how to recognise and report pension scams on page 29.

Contents

Getting started – checklist

What to do before accessing your pension pot

This checklist applies if you're fully retiring, partially retiring or just thinking of taking some of your pension pot early (in which case read 'your retirement date' as 'the date you plan to access your pension pot').

- Read this guide.
- Book your free Pension Wise appointment from MoneyHelper online or by calling 0800 138 3944.
- Gather together information about any pension based on your salary to which you are entitled, a summary of any other income or benefits you receive and of any savings, loans or debts you have.
- Trace any lost pensions using The Pension Tracing Service. Contact them online, by phone or in writing. Find out more about this free service at **gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details**. See *Useful contacts* page 36.
- Check your retirement date and pension pot(s) size – found on your pension statements.
- Read all of the information sent by your pension scheme or provider – including the options they can offer. Ask them to explain anything you don't understand.
- Check key dates – if you want to change your retirement date, ask your pension scheme or provider whether this is possible and ask what charges apply and if there are any deadlines for notifying them.
- Check whether your pension scheme guarantees to pay a certain level of income – called a guaranteed annuity rate (GAR) or minimum income guarantee. If it does, this is likely to guarantee a highly competitive retirement income that will pay out until you die and you should think very carefully before giving this up. This is something you will want to discuss at your Pension Wise appointment or with a financial adviser.
- Check whether there are any other conditions, special features, guarantees or charges that might affect when and how you take your pension, or will apply if you transfer it to another scheme or provider.
- Find out how much State Pension you expect to receive – go to **gov.uk/check-state-pension**. See *Useful contacts* on page 36.
- Find out more about your retirement income options at **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-income-options**

Pension Wise

Pension Wise from MoneyHelper is a free and impartial service that helps you understand what you can do with your pension pot money.

It offers free guidance appointments over the telephone and face-to-face to help you understand your options and support you in making the right decision. Whatever your planned retirement date, you can book an appointment if you are aged 50 or over and have a defined contribution pension pot. You also qualify if you're under 50 with ill-health or inherited a defined contribution pension pot.

It also provides information on the Pension Wise website at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** about your options for taking your pension pot, including understanding the tax implications of the different choices.

Pension Wise provides guidance on defined contribution pensions. It does not provide guidance on defined benefit pensions, which include 'final salary' and 'career average' pension schemes.

Pension Wise can help you:

- understand the right things to think about when considering your choices, such as your plans to continue working, your personal and financial circumstances, and leaving money after you die
- understand the different options for accessing your pension pot(s), and the features of each
- understand the tax implications of each choice.

Top tip

No matter how large or small your pension pot, we encourage you to take advantage of Pension Wise to help you understand what your choices are.

The service is impartial and won't recommend companies or tell you how to use your pension pot or invest your money.

After you have taken guidance, if you are clear on which option you are choosing and this involves buying a retirement income product, shop around to make sure you get the best value product for you. If you are not sure how to do this, or you are still unclear about which option is best for you, we recommend you get regulated financial advice.

How to get your free Pension Wise guidance

We recommend you visit the MoneyHelper website at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise** to see what the service offers and to begin to understand your available options.

To book an appointment, visit the MoneyHelper website or call **0800 138 3944**.

To qualify for an appointment, you must be 50 years old or over and have a defined contribution pension. For more information visit **moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise**.

Our booking lines are open 8am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday.

We'll send you an email to confirm your appointment.

Preparing for your appointment

To make the most of a Pension Wise appointment it would be helpful to have:

- the value of your pension pot(s) and whether there are any guarantees or special features that apply to your pot – check your pension statement or ask your scheme or provider. If you have more than one pension pot, remember to gather information on all of them – see page 3 for how to contact The Pension Tracing Service who can help you locate the address of an old pension provider if you've lost track of a pension
- an estimate of how much State Pension you may get and when. To get a State Pension forecast, go to **gov.uk/check-state-pension**. See *Useful contacts* on page 36.
- notes on your financial circumstances, such as your salary and any relevant savings or debts, and the value of any benefits you're currently receiving – to give Pension Wise a fuller picture from which to discuss your options

You will also be asked about any medical or health conditions that may affect your life expectancy as they could result in you getting a better income in retirement.

After your appointment

If you are buying a retirement income product, it's crucial that you shop around. Ideally, check with a regulated financial adviser before you make a final decision.

You will find guidance on how to shop around for different retirement income products in the relevant sections of this guide.

Turn the page to learn more about getting regulated financial advice - in particular the value of taking regulated financial advice and how to find a financial adviser.

Pension Wise

moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise

Notes from your Pension Wise meeting

Whatever else you do (or don't do), make sure you book your free Pension Wise appointment to help you understand your options.
See page 4 for more information.
You can book an appointment from age 50, whatever your planned retirement date.

Pension Wise

Getting regulated financial advice

After your Pension Wise appointment, you might still need some help to make a final decision.

Retirement income planning is complicated and the options you have – including postponing taking your pension – differ in suitability depending on your personal circumstances. The choices you make will affect your income for the rest of your life. We therefore recommend that you speak to a regulated financial adviser after your Pension Wise appointment, unless you are certain that you understand which option is right for you.

If some of your pension pot will remain invested (for example, if you opt for a flexible retirement income) then most people need ongoing help and advice managing their investments.

Financial advisers are qualified professionals who will recommend which course of action is right for you after taking account of your overall financial and personal circumstances. They are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and must follow their rules. If the advice they give you turns out to be unsuitable, you can make a complaint and if necessary, go to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Financial advisers charge a fee but their expertise offers peace of mind and can help prevent costly mistakes. There are tax breaks available to help with their fee – see *The Pension Advice Allowance* on the next page.

Independent or restricted advice

Independent financial advisers can recommend financial product types from all providers. Financial advisers offering 'restricted advice' may specialise in certain product types and/or are restricted in the number of providers they can recommend. If you use an adviser who offers 'restricted advice' make sure you understand what the restriction applies to.

For the widest choice of retirement income products, you ideally want an adviser who can recommend products from the whole of the market they are advising on.

What does it cost?

A financial adviser will charge either a percentage of your pension pot, a charge per hour or a fixed fee. You can pay up front, or have the fee deducted from the pension pot. Most offer an initial meeting for free. Advisers will always give you an estimate of how much their services will cost before you commit yourself.

The Pension Advice Allowance

The Pension Advice Allowance allows you to withdraw £500 tax-free from your pension pot on three separate occasions, (but no more than once in a tax year), to help to pay for advice from a regulated financial adviser.

The Allowance only applies to defined contribution (also known as 'money purchase') pension schemes, but be warned – not all pension providers offer the Allowance and it's not compulsory to do so. Check first to see if your pension provider does.

You can find a regulated financial adviser from the MoneyHelper Retirement Adviser Directory at **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-adviser-directory**

Getting help or advice from product providers

If you are completely confident about which option and product is right for you, you could go direct to a product provider. But make sure you shop around thoroughly first and be sure to ask whether they are offering you financial advice and a recommendation or just information.

If they are offering just information you must be confident that any retirement income product you choose is right for you and that you can't get a better deal elsewhere. You have no protection if the product you buy turns out to be unsuitable.

If they offer advice, bear in mind that this is likely to be limited to their own products.

What does it cost?

If you use a provider's advised service you'll pay a fee as described earlier.

If you buy without advice, the cost of their service may be built into the quote they offer you – this won't necessarily be any cheaper than getting advice but is harder to spot. Be sure to ask what the intermediary or provider is being paid for the service.

Top tip

Only choose a financial adviser who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) as this gives you certain protections.

Find a financial adviser

Use the MoneyHelper Retirement Adviser Directory at **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-adviser-directory** to find the right adviser for you.

The advisers listed will offer regulated financial advice based on your needs and circumstances, This may include recommending products from providers, making it easier for you to find the right one. MoneyHelper maintains the directory using information directly from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) so you can have peace of mind that you're always dealing with an authorised and regulated firm.

Options for using your pension pot

You have the choice of taking money from your pension pot through one of the options below, or a combination of them. Depending on your age and personal circumstances, some or all of these options could be suitable for you.

Your main options are:

Retire later or delay taking your pension – keep your pension invested until you want to take it. See page 11.

Use your pension pot to buy a guaranteed income for life or for a fixed term – also known as a lifetime or fixed term annuity. The income is taxable, but you can normally choose to take up to 25% (sometimes more with some policies) of your pot as a one-off tax-free lump sum at the outset. See page 13.

Use your pension pot to provide a flexible retirement income – also known as pension drawdown. Take the amount you are allowed to take as a tax-free lump sum (normally up to 25%) then use the rest to provide a regular taxable income. See page 19.

Take your pension pot as a number of lump sums – usually, 25% of each cash withdrawal from your pot will be tax-free. The rest will be taxed. See page 22.

Take your pension pot in one go – Usually 25% will be tax-free and the rest is taxable. See page 25.

Mix your options – choose any combination of the above, using different parts of your pot or separate pots. See page 27.

You must have reached normal minimum pension age to access your pension pot – currently 55, this will increase to 57 in 2028. Only in very rare circumstances (such as ill health) will you be able to access your pot before age 55. Check with your pension provider.

Options at a glance

Remember that you can mix these options. Ask about this at your free Pension Wise appointment then shop around or get financial advice.

Options → **Features of each option ↓**	**Get a guaranteed income for life (annuity)***	**Take a flexible retirement income**	**Take a number of lump sums**	**Take whole pot in one go**
How much tax-free cash can I get?	Usually 25% of pot[1]			
Regular income?	Yes	Yes[2]	No	No
Guaranteed income for life?	Yes	No	No	No
Do I need to review my pension pot regularly?	No	Yes	Yes	N/A
Could my money run out later in retirement?	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pays higher income for medical conditions?	Yes	No	N/A	N/A
Can I change my mind and use my pot differently?	No	Yes	Yes[3]	No
Will my tax rate go up when I access my pot?	Depends on amount taken when added to other income			
Is tax relief on my pension savings affected?	No[4]	Yes – once you start to draw an income[5]	Yes[5]	Yes[5]

*If you choose a guaranteed income for a fixed term, income will be guaranteed for the term only, not for life.

1. Applies to the amount of your pension pot you choose to use to buy this product. If you use all of your pot to buy the product and don't take any tax-free cash at the time, you can't go back and take it later. Note that with some older policies, a higher rate of tax-free cash might be available. The maximum tax-free cash you can take is £268,275 (unless previous protections are in place).
2. If choosing this option you can take income at times to suit you, although many people use it to take a regular income.
3. The part of your pension pot not cashed in continues to be tax-free and can be used to buy a retirement income product.
4. If you take an income from a fixed-term annuity or a lifetime annuity which could decrease (such as an investment linked annuity), then tax relief is limited by the Money Purchase Annual Allowance (see page 34).
5. Tax relief is limited to contributions up to the lower amount of either 100% of your salary or £10,000 a year (tax year 2024/25). Different rules can apply where you take the whole pot in one go and it's worth less than £10,000.

See page 31 *Jargon buster* for more information on the above allowances.

Retire later or delay taking your pension pot

You don't have to take your pot just because you've reached your selected retirement age or age 55. The later you take your money, the higher your potential income, as the money in your pot could continue to grow and will need to last for a shorter time.

How it works

Your pot continues to be invested tax-free until you need it – potentially providing more income once you start taking money out.

You (and your employer) can continue making contributions, however there are restrictions on how much you can save each year and over a lifetime, and still receive tax relief.

In most cases, you can get tax relief each year on pension contributions until age 75 on up to 100% of your taxable earnings. However, there is an overall limit on total contributions in a year, including tax relief and any employer contributions, of £60,000. This is known as the annual allowance. However, if you're a very high earner your annual allowance might be lower To find out more, see *Annual allowance* on page 31, and *Tapered annual allowance* on page 35.

If you don't have any earnings, you can still get tax relief on up to £3,600 of pension savings each year until age 75.

Things to think about

If you don't need the money from your pension pot and you haven't made firm plans for retirement, then the option to 'retire later' should be carefully considered. The longer you delay, the higher your potential retirement income, as the money you have saved into your pension pot could continue to grow.

However money that is invested can also go down in value, so make sure you review your investments regularly and, if necessary, get advice from a regulated financial adviser. You will have to pay for the advice, but it could save you a lot of money (and worry) in the long run.

There will be ongoing costs for leaving your pot where it is – but there are costs involved in all options, so don't let this put you off. Your provider should confirm all the costs you will pay if you leave your pension pot invested with them so make sure you review these regularly to check that the provider is still offering value for money.

Be sure to check with your pension scheme or provider whether there are any restrictions or charges for changing your retirement date, and the process and deadline for telling them.

Also check that you won't lose any valuable income guarantees if you delay your retirement date.

The lifetime allowance was the most you can build up in pensions during your lifetime without additional tax charges. It was abolished in April 2024 and replaced with new allowances.

The lump sum allowance (LSA) limits the maximum tax-free cash payable in your lifetime when taking money from a pension to £268,275 for most people. The lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA) limits the total amount of tax-free sums payable in your lifetime and on your death to £1,073,100 for most people. You might pay Income Tax on lump sums above the allowances, so we suggest you speak to a regulated financial adviser.

If you want your pot to remain invested after the age of 75, you'll need to check that your pension scheme or provider will allow this. If not, you may need to transfer to another scheme or provider who will.

Not all pension schemes and providers will allow you to delay. If you want to delay but don't have this option, shop around and, ideally, get financial advice before moving your pension. See page 7 for how to do this.

What happens when you die

When you die, any unused pension pots normally fall outside your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes and can be passed on to any nominated beneficiary. The Income Tax rules for accessing inherited pension pots are set out to the right. In both cases the money continues to be tax-free while still invested.

If you die before age 75:

Your pension pot will pass tax-free to your nominated beneficiary provided the money is paid within two years of the provider becoming aware of your death. If the lump sum is more than the LSDBA, your beneficiary will usually pay income tax on the amount over the allowance. If it is paid after the two-year limit, the money will be added to the beneficiary's other income and taxed at the appropriate rate.

If you die age 75 or over:

When the money is taken out (lump sum or income) it will be added to the beneficiary's income and taxed at the appropriate Income Tax rate(s). However, if the beneficiary is not an individual but is, for example, a company or trust, any lump sum will be taxed at 45%.

> There's no hurry to start taking your pension if you don't need to but check whether restrictions apply or if you'll lose benefits if you take it later.

If you are over State Pension age, money in a pension could affect your entitlement to benefits even if you do not take any money out. Entitlement to State Pension is not affected by leaving a pot invested.

Use your pension pot to get a guaranteed income for life or for a fixed term

Guaranteed income products are also known as annuities. You can choose to buy one that will last as long as you live (a lifetime annuity) or for a fixed term (a fixed-term annuity).

How it works

You can normally choose to take up to 25% (a quarter) of your pot as a one-off tax-free lump sum and use all or some of the rest to buy a guaranteed income. The income can be guaranteed for life or for a fixed term. You can buy from your own provider (if it sells them) or another provider.

Generally, the older you are when you take out a guaranteed income product (annuity), the higher the income you'll get. But keep in mind that annuity rates fluctuate regularly in line with market conditions, so they could be higher or lower in future.

You may be able to choose to receive your income monthly, quarterly, half-yearly or yearly, depending on the scheme or provider. This type of income is taxable. See *Tax you will pay* on page 16.

Lifetime income options

Lifetime guaranteed income products are more familiarly known as lifetime annuities. There are several options to choose from:

Single or joint: you can choose an income for you only which stops when you die (single), or one that also provides an income for your spouse, civil partner or other nominated beneficiary after you die (joint). A joint income will be lower as it's designed to pay out for longer.

Level or increasing: you can choose an income that is fixed at the same amount throughout your life (level) or one that starts lower but rises over time by a set amount or by inflation (increasing).

Guarantee Period: a form of protection which guarantees that the income will continue for a set period of time should you die during that period. For example, if you opt for a guarantee period of ten years and die after two years, payments would continue to a nominated beneficiary for eight years.

Value Protection: another form of protection but this type ensures a lump sum is returned to your beneficiary if you die before you have received back, as income, the full amount used to buy your annuity. So if you paid £50,000 and only received back £30,000 in income by the time you died, £20,000 would be paid to your beneficiary. You would normally choose one type of protection – so **either** a guaranteed period or value protection.

You may be able to combine some of these options, so for example a joint income that increases in line with inflation. Your choices affect how much income you can get, and how much that income will cost.

Where you live when you buy the annuity may also affect how much income you get.

Be honest – and get a higher income

If you smoke, are on medication or have a medical condition you may be eligible for an 'enhanced' guaranteed income (also known as an 'enhanced', impaired' or 'lifestyle' annuity). These tend to pay a higher income because they expect to pay out over a shorter time. So be sure to opt into health and lifestyle questions and answer them honestly. Otherwise you could be turning down a considerably higher income, in some cases up to 50% more.

Fixed-term guaranteed income options

Instead of opting for a guaranteed income paid out for life, you can choose to have it paid for a set term, usually between 3 and 25 years (also known as a fixed-term annuity).

You can either stipulate how much income you want and for how long and get a quote for the cost – or you can stipulate how much you want to pay and how long you want the income for and get a quote for the amount of income that will buy you. There are only a few providers of fixed-term guaranteed income products, so it's worth checking with all of them as they do have different rates. You can get quotes for both lifetime guaranteed income products and fixed-term guaranteed income products by using our comparison table **moneyhelper.org.uk/guaranteed-income**

With fixed-term guaranteed income products you can also choose to have a cash sum returned at the end of the term. This is known as the 'maturity value'. You can either stipulate how much you want back, or the provider(s) will calculate this for you depending on how much of your pension pot you are using and/or how much income you want.

Usually, providers include some form of protection so that you will have something returned to your beneficiaries if you die during the fixed term - however this varies between providers. Some will continue to pay the income until the end of the fixed term and guarantee to pay any maturity value requested. Others just pay back the balance of income unpaid. Before you choose which provider to use for your fixed term income product, check the level of protection they offer.

More features or a higher level of protection may come with a higher cost or reduce the income you can get. We recommend you run several quotes through our comparison tables to see what you might be able to get with different providers.

Investment linked income products

Also known as investment linked annuities, these products carry more risk than guaranteed income products as your income rises and falls in line with the value of investments you choose when buying the product. You can still choose an income product that pays out for a fixed term or for life but either way the level of income you get isn't guaranteed.

Some products allow you to change your investment options or take lower payments later.

Things to think about

Is locking in right for you?

Guaranteed income products (annuities) provide a regular income for life or for a fixed term, so are a good option if you want peace of mind or are worried about your money running out.

However, once you've bought a guaranteed income product you have very little time to change your mind so think carefully before you commit.

If you're unsure about committing to a guaranteed lifetime income product now you could use another option to start with or go with a fixed-term income product and buy a lifetime income later when you may get a higher income due to your age.

Life expectancy

If you have a very limited life expectancy, a guaranteed lifetime income product may not be the right option for you.

Guaranteed annuity rate

Some older pension policies offered a guaranteed rate of income when you retire (known as a guaranteed annuity rate or GAR). If your pension policy has this option, this can be a valuable benefit and may be hard to match in the market – however shop around to check.

If you have a guaranteed annuity rate your provider should tell you about it and its value relative to the open market in the information it sends you.

Key points

- You don't have to buy your existing provider's guaranteed income product – many people get a better retirement income from a different provider.
- Take your time and shop around.
- Make sure you check whether you could get a better income because of your health or lifestyle – called an 'enhanced annuity'.
- Ask if your provider offers a 'guaranteed annuity rate' – if they do it's likely to offer a highly competitive income, which you may not want to lose.

Cost of living

Consider whether you should take a product that provides an increasing income. Inflation (the general rise in the price of goods and services over time) can significantly reduce your standard of living over time.

Providing for dependants

Also think carefully about whether you need to provide an income for your partner or another dependant on your death.

Tax-free lump sum

If you buy a guaranteed income with money from a pension pot you've already used for another income option (e.g. to provide a flexible retirement income – see page 19), you can't take a further tax-free lump sum – even if you chose not to take a tax-free lump sum with the other option.

Comparing products

Not all pension schemes and providers offer guaranteed lifetime or fixed-term income products. Some may only offer one type, or offer to buy one on your behalf.

If your provider offers you a quote for a lifetime guaranteed income, they usually have to also give you a further quote from the open market for comparison.

Tax you will pay

You will have to pay tax on the income you receive, in the same way you pay tax on your salary. How much you pay depends on your total income and the Income Tax rate(s) that applies to you.

Your provider will take tax off your income before you receive it - called PAYE (Pay As You Earn). Because they won't know your overall income they may use an emergency tax code to start with. This means you may pay too much tax initially and have to claim the money back – or you may owe more tax if you have other sources of income.

Tax relief on future pension savings

After buying a guaranteed income product for the whole of your life you can in most cases continue to get tax relief on pension savings of up to the annual allowance of £60,000, or 100% of your taxable earnings if lower. See *Annual allowance* on page 31.

However, if you buy a lifetime annuity where the income you receive could go down, such as an investment-linked annuity, the maximum contributions that can be paid into a money purchase or defined contribution pension scheme, and still qualify for tax relief, is limited to the lower of £10,000 (the Money Purchase Annual Allowance for 2024/25) or 100% of your taxable earnings. If you want to carry on saving into a pension the option of buying an investment-linked annuity may not be suitable.

See *Money Purchase Annual Allowance* on page 34.

Benefits

The income and/or tax-free cash generated by your guaranteed income product could affect your entitlement to benefits now or in later life. To find out how income or savings can affect benefits, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits/problems-with-benefits/how-do-savings-and-lump-sum-pay-outs-affect-benefits**

What happens when you die

If you have a single life guaranteed income product and no other features, your pension stops when you die. Otherwise, the tax rules vary depending on your age as shown below.

If you die before age 75:

- Income from a joint **guaranteed income product** will be paid to your dependant or other nominated beneficiary tax-free for the rest of their life.
- If you die within a **guarantee period** (see page 13) the remaining payments will pass tax-free to your nominated beneficiary then stop when the guarantee period ends.
- Any lump sum payment due from a **value protected guaranteed lifetime income product** (see page 13) will be paid tax-free. If the lump sum is more than the LSDBA, your beneficiary will usually pay income tax on the amount over the allowance. It will also normally fall outside your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes.

Don't just look at the quotes that your own provider offers. Shop around to see if you can get a better deal with another provider. Many people do. You may want to consider getting financial advice before making a final decision.

To find out more about the different guaranteed income product types and features, including examples of how different choices affect your income, see our online guides and tools at **moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement**

If you die age 75 or over:

- Income from a joint **guaranteed income product** or a **continuing guarantee period** will be added to the beneficiary's overall income and taxed at the appropriate Income Tax rate.
- Joint payments will stop when your dependant or other beneficiary dies and any **guarantee period payments** stop when the guarantee period ends.
- Any lump sum due from a **value protected guaranteed income product** will be added to the beneficiary's overall income and taxed at the appropriate Income Tax rate.
- Lump sums due from a **value protected guaranteed income product** normally fall outside your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes.

Shopping around

Not all pension schemes and providers offer guaranteed income products. Also, those who do may not offer all types. Your provider is required to give you a comparative quote and to ask you some additional questions to find out if you might be eligible for a higher income – but it's still very limited information.

To shop around for a true comparison of what's on offer, be sure to follow one, or more, of the steps below:

- Compare guaranteed income products (annuities) using the MoneyHelper annuities comparison tool at **moneyhelper.org.uk/guaranteed-income**
- Use an annuity broker who will do the quote gathering for you. However, be careful because most don't offer advice or tell you which annuity is the best one for you. The decision is yours and if you choose the wrong one you can't make a complaint or get compensation.
- Speak to a regulated financial adviser. A financial adviser will also do the quote gathering for you but, unlike a broker, will recommend the most suitable product that meets your particular needs and circumstances. You will have to pay for the advice but you can find out first how much the advice will cost before committing yourself. Find out more about getting advice on page 7.

Use your pension pot to provide a flexible retirement income

You can move all or some of your pension pot to a flexible retirement income product known as 'pension drawdown'. The income normally isn't guaranteed but you have flexibility over the amount you can draw and how often.

How it works

Flexible retirement income products allow you to take your income at times to suit you – e.g. monthly, quarterly or yearly. Or you could take amounts as and when you want them. You can change your mind about the amount you take and how often. You can start taking your income straight away or wait until a later date.

You can normally choose to take up to a quarter (25%) of your pension pot as a tax-free lump sum and invest the rest in a flexible retirement income product – also known as pension drawdown. Like with all investments, the value of your funds could go up or down.

The income you take is taxable. See *Tax you will pay* on page 23.

Depending on what type of pension scheme you have you may have to transfer all of your pension pot into a new flexible income product and then take any tax-free lump sum. If your current pension provider doesn't offer flexible income products this will definitely be the case.

However, some pension providers may pay you your tax-free lump sum and simply adapt your current pension scheme into a flexible income product. This might seem less complicated and easier, but it means you haven't shopped around to compare your pension provider's product with others available. See *Why it's important to get advice* below for more information

Different pension schemes and providers have different processes so

Why it's important to get advice

Even if you just want to access your tax-free cash for now, you still have to make a decision about what to do with the other 75% of your pension pot. If you don't, then it's likely it will end up by default in your current provider's drawdown product. Your current provider's product may be the best one for you, but you won't know unless you have compared it with other products on the market. For example, there may be other products that have lower charges, a wider investment choice, or more flexible features. To help you shop around we strongly suggest you see a regulated financial adviser. An adviser can search the market for the best product for you and help you decide on your choice of investment funds. If you don't take advice and you end up in an unsuitable product, it's unlikely you will be able to make a complaint. For more help on how to find a regulated financial adviser, see page 7.

discuss this with your scheme or provider before you make a decision about what you want to do.

Investing your pension pot

Your provider will ask you how you want to invest your remaining pot when you move into a flexible income product. You will either need to choose your own investments, ie ones that match your attitude to risk and objectives for your money, or some providers will offer you to choose from simple ready-made investment options which are linked to your retirement plans (these are called investment pathways).

An investment pathway is a ready-made investment option, which simplifies the decision of how to invest your remaining pension pot after you've taken your tax-free lump sum.

Alternatively, unless you are a very confident investor it's worth considering getting help from a regulated financial adviser with this. You will have to pay an adviser a fee, but it could save you money and worry in the long run.

Things to think about

Unlike with a guaranteed income product (an annuity), the retirement income you receive from a flexible income product is not guaranteed, so you will need to think carefully about how much you withdraw.

Deciding how much income you can afford to take needs careful planning – it depends on the size of your pension pot, the period of time you'll need it to provide an income, the performance of the funds, what other sources of income you have, and whether you want to provide for a dependant or someone else after you die.

It also depends on how long you will live and many people underestimate this. Your retirement income could fall or even run out if you take too much too soon and start eating into money you originally invested. Also if stock markets fall you will need to adjust how much income you are taking.

A regulated financial adviser can help with this. See page 7.

Tax you will pay

You pay tax on any withdrawals you take outside of the tax-free lump sum. How much tax you pay depends on your total

Key points

- You don't have to stay with your existing provider's flexible income product. Other providers may offer more features, a wider investment range or lower charges.
- Take your time and shop around, although comparing these products is not easy and you may need help from a regulated financial adviser to get the best deal. Or you can use our Investment Pathways tool to shop around the market at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-drawdown-calculator**
- Think carefully about how long you need your pension pot to last before deciding how much to take from your flexible income product.

income and the Income Tax rate(s) that apply to you.

Your provider will deduct tax from your income payments in advance under PAYE (Pay As You Earn). Because they won't know your overall income they will use an emergency tax code to start with, which means you may initially pay too much tax – and have to claim the money back – or you may owe more tax if you have other sources of income.

Tax relief on future pension savings

Once you have started to take any money from your flexible retirement income product, the maximum contributions that can be paid into a money purchase or defined contribution pension scheme, and still qualify for tax relief, is limited to the lower of £10,000 (the *Money Purchase Annual Allowance*, see page 34) or 100% of your taxable earnings. If you want to carry on building up your pension pot, this may influence when you start taking your flexible retirement income.

The tax relief you get for future pension savings is not affected if you take the tax-free lump sum but no income.

Benefits

The income and lump sum you receive – and in some cases the value of your remaining flexible retirement income funds – could affect your entitlement to benefits now or when you grow older. To find out how income or savings can affect benefits, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits/problems-with-benefits/how-do-savings-and-lump-sum-pay-outs-affect-benefits**

What happens when you die

When you die, any funds remaining in your flexible income product don't usually count as part of your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes. The Income Tax rules for beneficiaries are set out below.

If you die before age 75:

Any remaining part of your pension pot will pass tax-free to your nominated beneficiary provided the money is paid within two years of the provider becoming aware of your death. You'll usually pay Income Tax on any lump sums over the LSDBA.

If it is paid after the two-year limit, the money will be added to the beneficiary's other income and taxed at the appropriate rate.

If you die age 75 or above:

If the lump sum is more than the LSDBA, your beneficiary will usually pay income tax on the amount over the allowance.

Shopping around

Flexible retirement income products are complicated to compare as the choice is vast and what's best for you will depend on many factors.

That's why you may wish to consider getting regulated financial advice. If you don't take advice and you end up in an unsuitable product, it's unlikely you will be able to make a complaint. See page 7 *Getting Financial Advice* before making any decisions. Or you can use our Investment Pathways tool to shop at **moneyhelper.org.uk/pension-drawdown-calculator**

Take your pension pot as a number of lump sums

You can leave your money in your pension pot and take lump sums from it when you need to, until your money runs out or you choose another option. Each lump sum you take is known as an Uncrystallised Funds Pension Lump Sum (UFPLS).

How it works

You take cash from your pension pot as and when you need it, and leave the rest invested tax-free.

For each cash withdrawal, normally 25% (a quarter) will be tax-free and the rest is taxable. See *Tax you will pay* on page 23.

There may be charges each time you make a cash withdrawal and/or limits on how many withdrawals you can make each year.

Unlike with the flexible retirement income option - see page 19 - your pot isn't automatically re-invested into new funds specifically chosen to pay you a regular income, but you can change your investment choice if you want to. It is a good idea to regularly review your investment choice to make sure your remaining funds match your retirement plans and how much of a risk you're willing to take. As with all investments, the value of your funds could go up or down.

Things to think about

This option generally won't provide a regular income for you.

Your pension pot reduces with each cash withdrawal. The earlier you start taking money out the greater the risk that your money could run out – or what's left won't grow sufficiently to generate the income you need to last you into old age. Remember – your pension pot needs to fund not just your immediate needs but also your expenses in the future.

The administration charges for each withdrawal could eat into your remaining pot – check how much these are.

The value of your pot's investments could fall in value – further adding to the risk of running out of money. It's therefore especially important to review it regularly – and it may mean you need to move or reinvest your pot at a later date. This may involve charges.

The money you leave in your pension pot will continue to be invested tax-free. Once you take it out, it will be added to your other income (like State Pension, benefits, salary) and taxed. If you spread the money you take over a number of tax years, and keep your total income within your current tax band, you will pay less tax. Taking large amounts at one time can push your total income into a higher tax band.

If you plan to use cash withdrawals from your pension to pay off debts, check out alternatives first. There may be better ways than using your pension savings.

To find out where to get free debt advice, use our Debt advice locator tool at
↳ **moneyhelper.org.uk/debt**

Tax you will pay

Usually, three-quarters (75%) of each cash withdrawal counts as taxable income.

This could increase your tax rate when added to your other income. How much tax you pay depends on your total income and the Income Tax rate(s) that applies to you.

Your pension scheme or provider will take off tax in advance – called PAYE (Pay As You Earn). Because they won't know your overall income, they will use an emergency tax code to start with. This means you may pay too much tax and have to claim the money back – or you may owe more tax if you have other sources of income.

If the total value of your pension savings is over the LSDBA, the amount of an UFPLS that you get tax-free could be reduced to less than 25%. The amount you will get tax-free will be limited to 25% (a quarter) of your remaining lifetime allowance, rather than 25% of the amount you are taking out.

See *lump sum allowance* on page 33 for more information, and our *Jargon buster* on page 11.

Tax relief on future pension savings

Once you have taken a lump sum, the maximum contributions that can be paid into a money purchase or defined contribution pension scheme, and still qualify for tax relief, is limited to the lower of £10,000 (the *Money Purchase Annual Allowance* see page 34) or 100% of your taxable earnings. If you want to carry on saving into a pension, this option may not be suitable.

To find out more, see *Money Purchase Annual Allowance* on page 34.

Key points

- With this option, your tax-free cash isn't all paid up front, instead a quarter of each lump sum you receive is tax-free.
- The funds your existing pot is invested in could fall in value and you could run out of money before you die.
- Three-quarters (75%) of each cash sum withdrawn counts as taxable income – taking large cash sums could increase your tax rate.

Benefits

Taking cash lump sums could reduce your entitlement to benefits now or as you grow older. To find out how income or savings can affect benefits, go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits/problems-with-benefits/how-do-savings-and-lump-sum-pay-outs-affect-benefits**

What happens when you die

When you die, any untouched part of your pension pot normally falls outside your estate for Inheritance Tax purposes. The Income Tax rules for beneficiaries are set out below.

If you die before age 75:

- any untouched part of your pension pot will pass tax-free to your nominated beneficiary provided the money is paid within two years of the provider becoming aware of your death. You'll usually pay Income Tax on lump sums over the LSDBA. If it is paid after the two-year limit, the money will be added to the beneficiary's other income and taxed at the appropriate rate.

If you die age 75 or over:

- any untouched part of your pension pot that you pass on - either as a lump sum or income - will be added to the beneficiary's overall income and taxed at the appropriate Income Tax rate.

Shopping around

Not all pension providers or schemes offer the ability to withdraw your pension pot as a number of lump sums. Shop around if you want this option and can't get it with your current provider, as charges and restrictions will vary.

However, if you talk directly to other product providers, ask whether they are offering you advice and a recommendation or just information. If they are offering just information, you must be confident that this option is right for you as you have no protection if choosing to take lump sums turns out to be unsuitable.

If you are unsure, ask for advice. The provider you speak to may be able to recommend a list of regulated financial advisers or offer their own advice service. However, if a provider offers advice they are normally restricted to just recommending their own products. If you want a wider choice then you should consult an independent financial adviser. See page 7 *Getting regulated financial advice.*

Take your pension pot in one go

You no longer have to convert your pension pot into an income if you don't want to. You can take out all of your pension savings in one go if you wish. This is also known as an Uncrystallised Funds Pension Lump Sum which uses up the whole of your pot.

How it works

You close your pension pot and withdraw it all as cash. Normally, 25% (a quarter) will be tax-free and the rest will be taxable.

Things to think about

This option won't provide a regular income for you – or for your spouse, civil partner or any dependant after you die. Get guidance from Pension Wise and consider taking financial advice before you commit.

Whatever is left after you take your tax-free cash is taxable, so your tax rate might go up when the money is added to your other income.

If you choose this option you can't change your mind – so you need to be certain that it's right for you. For many people it will be more tax efficient to consider one or more of the other options.

If you plan to use the cash to clear debts, buy a holiday, or indulge in a big-ticket item you need to think carefully before committing to this option. Doing so will reduce the money you will have to live on in retirement, and you could end up with a large tax bill.

If you have received a share of an ex-spouse or ex-civil partner's pension as a result of a divorce, you may not be able to take this option with that pension pot. Check with your pension scheme or provider.

There may be charges for cashing in your whole pot. Check with your scheme or provider.

Not all pension schemes and providers offer this option, and to access your money you may first need to transfer to another scheme or provider who does. However, this might incur charges and you may give up valuable benefits. We strongly suggest you speak to Pension Wise and take financial advice before considering this.

Tax tip

Taking your whole pot as cash could land you with a large tax bill – for some people it will be more tax efficient to use one of the other options. Get guidance or advice before you commit.

Tax you will pay

Normally, 25% (a quarter) will be tax-free and the rest will be treated as taxable income. (Although note that some older policies may allow you to take a higher amount tax-free – check with your policy provider.) How much tax you will pay depends on your total income and the Income Tax rate(s) that apply to you.

There is a risk that some of your income might be pushed into a higher tax rate with this option as your total income for the year will be increased.

Your pension scheme or provider will pay the cash and take off tax in advance using PAYE (Pay As You Earn). Because they won't know your overall income they will use an emergency tax code to do this. This means you may pay too much tax and have to claim the money back – or you may owe more tax if you have other sources of income.

If the total value of your pension savings is over the lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA), you'll have to pay tax at your marginal rate on the amount over the allowance. This means the amount you take home tax-free could be reduced to less than 25%. If your pot is worth less than £10,000, then 25% of the pot may be payable tax-free regardless of the total value of your pension savings.

See *lump sum allowance* on page 33 for more information.

Tax relief on future pension savings

Once you have cashed in your pension pot, the maximum contributions that can be paid into a money purchase or defined contribution pension scheme, and still qualify for tax relief, is limited to the lower of £10,000 (the Money Purchase Annual Allowance) or 100% of your taxable earnings.

See *Money Purchase Annual Allowance* on page 34.

However, the exception to this rule is that pension pots below £10,000 can be cashed in without affecting the annual allowance. You can cash in a maximum of three personal pension pots. There are no limits on the amount of certain workplace pensions you can cash in. Your pension provider will confirm any conditions that apply.

Benefits

Taking a cash sum could reduce any entitlement you have to benefits now, or as you grow older – for example to help with long-term care needs. To find out how income or savings can affect benefits go to **moneyhelper.org.uk/en/benefits/problems-with-benefits/how-do-savings-and-lump-sum-pay-outs-affect-benefits**

What happens when you die

Whatever age you die, any money remaining or investments bought with cash taken out of your pension pot will usually count as part of your estate for Inheritance Tax. By contrast, any part of your pot that was untouched would not normally be liable.

Mix your options

You don't have to choose one option – you can mix and match some options over time or over your total pension pot, whichever suits your needs. You can also keep saving into a pension if you wish, and get tax relief up to age 75.

How it works

Which option or combination is right for you will depend on:

- when you stop or reduce your work
- your income needs and attitude to risk
- your age and health
- the size of your pension pot and other savings and how much State Pension you're entitled to
- any pension or other savings of your spouse or partner, if relevant
- the possible effect on your entitlement to benefits
- whether you have financial dependants
- whether your circumstances are likely to change in the future.

You'll be talked through all of the options at your free Pension Wise appointment. See page 4.

Allocating pots when mixing options

When mixing your options you might:

- use different parts of one pot for more than one option
- use separate pots for separate options
- combine smaller pots before choosing one particular option.

Not all providers will allow you to use your pot for more than one option – you may need to transfer to another provider in order to do so.

If you have several pots you may wish to consider getting financial advice to work out how best to use them. An adviser will also tell you when it makes sense to combine pots. See page 7 for information on getting financial advice.

Not all pension schemes and providers will offer every option – but you still have the choice.

Examples

If you have one pot you could take 25% (a quarter) of your pension pot tax-free, use some of the remaining pot to buy a guaranteed income for life, and leave the remaining money in your pension pot invested to access on a flexible basis (pension drawdown).

Or if you have more than one pot, you could buy a guaranteed income for life with one and receive a flexible retirement income from another.

Tax-free lump sums when mixing options

Note that depending on how you access money from your pension pot you may only get one chance to take your tax-free amount.

For example, if you want to use your whole pension pot to take a flexible retirement income, if you take no tax-free cash at the time you first do this, ie when you move into drawdown, you can't go back and take a tax-free lump sum later.

However, if you only moved part of your pot into drawdown and left some of your original pension pot untouched, you could take 25% of the amount you move and then, move more of your pot into drawdown later. You could then take up to 25% of the remaining untouched money you move as a tax-free lump sum at that point.

What happens when you die

The same rules apply for passing on your remaining pension as already set out for each option.

How to spot pension and investment scams

Pension and investment scams are on the increase in the UK. Every day fraudsters are using sophisticated ways to part savers from their money. Check the facts before you make an irreversible decision – a lifetime's savings can be lost in moments.

In particular, beware of people contacting you out of the blue about your pension or running advertisements claiming to offer 'free pension reviews', 'no-obligation consultations', unrealistic investment returns or tax loopholes.

Also beware of promises to access your pension pot below the age of 55 – sometimes known as 'pension liberation' or 'pension loans'. Only in very rare cases is this legally possible – such as if you're in very poor health – so don't believe them. The aim of these unscrupulous firms or individuals is to persuade you to cash in your pension pot and hand the money to them to invest.

These outfits may be very sophisticated and have convincing websites. Some may imply that they are part of the government-backed MoneyHelper or Pension Wise guidance service by including the terms 'pension' and 'wise' or 'guidance' in their name.

Scammers may:

- try to persuade you to take your entire pension as cash – or a large lump sum – and let them invest it for you, often in unregulated investments (meaning you have no protection if things go wrong)
- promise extra tax savings and/or very high returns from overseas investments or new or 'creative' investments
- say they can help you or someone else unlock your pension before age 55, for example by transferring to another pension scheme.

Once you've transferred your pension or handed over your lump sum it may be too late. Many victims have lost their entire pension savings to scams. You could face a large tax bill from HM Revenue & Customs.

Government-backed services such as MoneyHelper and Pension Wise will never contact you out of the blue. Put the phone down if you receive an unexpected call and always check you have the right website. See *Useful contacts* on page 36.

How to spot a scam

As well as the points above, watch out for one or more of these common features of scams:

- being approached out of the blue over the phone, via text message or social media, or in person door-to-door
- you aren't given long to make a decision or you feel pressured into making one immediately
- the only contact details they give you or on their website are a mobile phone number and a PO box address
- a firm doesn't want or allow you to call them back
- for further information on pension scams, visit **thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/pension-scams**

Always check the credentials of anyone who contacts you

The law requires all firms offering regulated financial products or advice to be registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to conduct business.

- If you're unsure about a firm that has contacted you, use the FCA's online register to check if a firm is registered at **fca.org.uk/register** or call them on **0800 111 6768**.

Check the facts before you make any irreversible decision. Remember that you could lose your lifetime's savings.

If you think you're being targeted

- Don't be rushed into making a decision. Before you sign anything, contact us on **0800 011 3797**.
- Make sure the firm is registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) before you agree to anything.
- Check the FCA's ScamSmart website pages at **fca.org.uk/scamsmart** – they will tell you the names of known investment scheme scams and allow you to check whether a firm appears on their warning list.

If you've accepted an offer or lost money

- If you've already signed something you're now unsure about, contact your pension provider straight away. They may be able to stop a transfer that hasn't taken place yet. Then call Action Fraud on **0300 123 2040** to report it.
- If you've already been scammed, you can call MoneyHelper's Financial Crime and Scams Unit on **0800 015 4402**.

Top tip

If you think you have been the victim of a pension scam, you can book an appointment with our dedicated Pension Loss Appointment Service by emailing **virtual.appointments@moneyhelper.org.uk**

Jargon buster

Adjusted income

Your annual income before tax plus the value of your own and any employer pension contributions.

Alternative Annual Allowance

The limit on pension savings you can build up in a defined benefit pension in any one year once you trigger the Money Purchase Annual Allowance. The Alternative Annual Allowance for people who are contributing £10,000 a year to a defined contribution pension is £50,000 but may be a lesser amount if the *Tapered annual allowance* (see page 35) applies for the tax year concerned.

See also *Defined benefit pension and Money Purchase Annual Allowance.*

Annual allowance

The limit on how much untaxed money you can build up in your pension in any one year based on your own contributions, any employer contributions and any contributions made on your behalf by someone else. The annual allowance is £60,000 for most people.

The annual allowance applies across all your pension savings, not per scheme. If you exceed the annual allowance, a tax charge is made which claws back any tax relief that was given at source. See also *Money Purchase Annual Allowance*, page 34.

If your taxable earnings in the year are below the annual allowance then tax relief on your pension contributions is limited to 100% of your earnings (or to £3,600 if you have no earnings).

If your adjusted income is above £260,000 the annual allowance is gradually reduced or 'tapered'.

See *Adjusted Income* and *Tapered annual allowance*.

Annuity

A financial product that provides you with a guaranteed regular income in return for a lump sum usually taken from a pension pot. The income can be guaranteed for life or for a set period. See also *Lifetime annuity, Fixed-term annuity and Investment-linked annuity*.

Cash balance pension

A pension arrangement where your employer promises you a pension pot of a specified amount, when you reach retirement age. Typically, the amount is calculated as a proportion of your salary for each year of service.

You know how much your pot will be, but there is no promise as to the amount of pension you will be able to buy (or take) from it.

Defined benefit pension

A pension scheme that pays a retirement income based on your salary and how long you have worked for your employer. Defined benefit pensions include 'final salary' and 'career average' pension schemes. Generally now only available from public sector or older workplace pension schemes.

Defined contribution pension

A pension scheme that builds up a pension pot to pay you a retirement income based on contributions from you and/or your employer. Your pot is put into various types of investments, including shares. The amount in your pension pot at retirement is based on how much has been paid in and how well the investments have performed. Also known as 'money purchase' schemes. Includes workplace and personal pensions, including stakeholder pensions. Might be run through an insurance company or master trust provider, or through a bespoke scheme set up by your employer.

Drawdown

See *Flexible retirement income product*.

Fixed-term annuity

A retirement income product that guarantees a regular income for a set period – typically 5 or 10 years but can be longer – and can pay out a 'maturity amount' at the end.

Financial adviser

See *Regulated financial adviser*.

Final salary pension

See *Defined benefit pension*.

Flexible retirement income product

More commonly known as 'income drawdown' or 'pension drawdown'. This allows you to use your pension pot to provide a regular retirement income by reinvesting it in funds specifically designed and managed for this purpose. The income isn't guaranteed for life but you have the flexibility to make changes to how much you take or to later switch to more secure retirement income products.

Replaced flexible drawdown and capped drawdown from April 2015, although existing users of capped drawdown can continue in that plan.

Flexible investment-linked annuity

Pays a lifelong regular retirement income that may rise and fall in line with underlying investments, but where a minimum monthly payment is guaranteed for life. Also allows you to choose and change monthly payment amounts, including opting for lower payments later in life. Sometimes called a variable annuity.

Guaranteed annuity rate (GAR)

A valuable guaranteed income which may be offered by your own pension scheme or provider if you take a lifetime annuity with them. Likely to be hard to match by shopping around.

Guaranteed drawdown

A hybrid product that combines a guaranteed income for life with the features of a flexible retirement income product.

Hybrid products

Products that combine features of annuities and flexible retirement income products to provide a retirement income.

Income drawdown

A term often used to describe taking your pension as a 'flexible retirement income product' or 'pension drawdown'.

Income Tax rates

Income Tax is split into bands and you pay different rates based on these bands. In 2024/25 the bands are 20%, 40% and 45% in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and 19%, 20%, 21%, 42%, 45% and 48% in Scotland. Your pension income is added to your other earnings and then taxed according to which tax band (or bands) it falls inside.

Inflation

Increase in the general level of prices of goods and services.

Investment-linked annuity

A retirement income product that guarantees to pay out for life but not a set amount – payments will rise and fall in line with the value of the underlying investments. A minimum monthly income may be guaranteed if performance is weak.

Lifetime allowance

Until 5 April 2024, this was the total amount you could save into pensions during your lifetime while still getting tax relief, which is currently £1,073,100. If you went over the allowance you would pay an LTA tax charge on the excess when taking money from your pension either by setting up a regular income or taking lump sums. For 2023/24 the lifetime allowance was charged at 0% and abolished entirely in April 2024. However, there will still be Income Tax to pay at your marginal rate.

If you die leaving untouched pension savings that exceed the lifetime allowance – and you have not already been assessed against it – then your nominated beneficiary will be assessed for Income Tax at their marginal rate.

Lifetime annuity

A retirement income product that guarantees a regular income for the rest of your life. The income may stay level, be linked to inflation or rise gradually at set rates, depending on which features you choose. Includes the option to provide for a spouse, civil partner or dependant for life after you die in return for a lower income.

Lump sum allowance

The limit on the tax-free cash payable in your lifetime from a pension pot. For most people, this is £268,275.

Tax-free lump sums paid out before 6 April 2024 use up part of your lump sum allowance and your lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA). You'll usually pay Income Tax on lump sums above the allowances.

If your total pension savings are at or near the level of the LSDBA, consider getting specialist tax advice from a regulated financial adviser before taking any money from your pension.

Lump sum and death benefit allowance (LSDBA)

The limit on the maximum tax-free cash payable in your lifetime and on your death from a pension pot. For most people, this is £1,073,100. See also *Lump sum allowance*.

Market value reduction

A reduction to your pension pot that could apply if your pension pot is invested into a with-profits fund and you cash it in before or after its maturity date, or other date(s) specified in the policy terms and conditions.

Money purchase pension

See *Defined contribution pension.*

Money Purchase Annual Allowance (MPAA)

If you start to take money from your defined contribution pension, this can trigger a lower annual allowance of £10,000, known as the Money Purchase Annual Allowance (MPAA). This means that the maximum contributions from all sources that can be paid into a money purchase or defined contribution pension scheme and still qualify for tax relief will be £10,000 (the MPAA for 2024/25). Tax relief on your personal contributions is limited to your taxable earnings, which may be lower.

As a basic guide, the main situations when you'll trigger the MPAA are:

- if you take your entire pot as a lump sum or start to take ad-hoc lump sums from your pension pot
- if you put your pension pot money into a flexi-access drawdown scheme and start to take an income
- if you buy an investment-linked or flexible annuity where your income could decrease
- if you have a pre-April 2015 capped drawdown plan and start to take payments that exceed the cap.

The MPAA won't normally be triggered if:

- you take a tax-free cash lump sum and buy a lifetime annuity that provides a guaranteed income for life (that either stays level or increases)
- you take a tax-free cash lump sum and put your pension pot into a flexi-access drawdown scheme but don't take any income from it
- you cash in one or more small pension pots valued at less than £10,000. (Applies in most cases).

The MPAA of £10,000 only applies to contributions to defined contribution pensions and not defined benefit pension schemes.

Pension Advice Allowance

Allows you to withdraw £500 on up to three occasions from your defined contribution pension pot(s) tax-free, to put towards the cost of pensions or retirement advice. Can only be used once in any tax year. May be used at any age and redeemed against the cost of regulated financial advice either face-to-face, by telephone or online. Not available with defined benefit schemes, but can be used if you have a 'hybrid' pension that has a defined contribution element.

Regulated financial adviser

A qualified professional who is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and must follow their rules when giving financial advice. Will recommend financial products only after taking account of your overall financial and personal circumstances. If the advice they give you turns out to be unsuitable you can make a complaint and if necessary take your case to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

'Independent financial advisers' can recommend all financial product types and all providers. Financial advisers offering 'restricted advice' specialise in certain product types and/or restrict how many providers' products they look at.

State Pension

A regular payment from government that you qualify for when you reach State Pension age. The State Pension age for men and women is now 66. It's due to rise further to 67 by 2028. The amount you get depends on your National Insurance record.

Tapered annual allowance

The annual allowance of £60,000 is reduced or 'tapered' if your 'adjusted income' (your annual income before tax plus the value of your own and any employer pension contributions) is over £260,000 (2024/25). In this case, the annual allowance will reduce by £1 for every £2 that your income exceeds £260,000 to a minimum of £10,000 (2024/25). If your annual income after tax and excluding pension contributions is below £200,000 (2024/25) the tapered reduction will not normally apply.

The tapered annual allowance applies to both defined contribution and defined benefit pension schemes.

Tax-free lump sum

An amount of cash set by law that you can take at retirement free of tax.

It's usually up to 25% (a quarter) of your pension although some older policies may allow you to take more – check with your policy provider. The maximum tax-free cash you can take is £268,275 (unless you have previously protected your lifetime allowance).

Sometimes simply referred to as 'tax-free cash'.

Transitional tax-free amount certificate

Where you have pensions valued at or near £1,073,100 and have taken money from a pension pot up to 5 April 2024, it's important to check before taking any further money from your pensions if you should apply for a transitional tax-free amount certificate. In some circumstances, it can increase the amount of tax-free cash you're entitled to.

Uncrystallised pension fund

A pension pot that has not been accessed for retirement income.

Uncrystallised funds pension lump sum (UFPLS)

A cash sum taken from a pension pot. Referred to in this booklet as 'a number of lump sums'. For each withdrawal, 25% (a quarter) will be tax-free and the rest will be taxed at your appropriate tax rate.

Useful contacts

MoneyHelper

MoneyHelper is independent and backed by government to help people make the most of their money by giving free, impartial money and pensions guidance to everyone across the UK – online and over the phone.

For free and impartial guidance on any money or pension queries, you can contact us by calling on:

Money guidance
0800 138 7777
Mon - Fri 8am to 6pm
+44 20 3553 2279
if you're outside the UK

Pensions guidance
0800 011 3797
Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm
+44 20 7932 5780
if you're outside the UK

Or visit **moneyhelper.org.uk**

Webchat:

moneyhelper.org.uk/moneychat

moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionschat

WhatsApp:

+44 7701 342744
(money guidance)

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

Complaints and compensation

Financial Ombudsman Service

0800 023 4567
financial-ombudsman.org.uk

Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS)

0800 678 1100
fscs.org.uk

The Pensions Ombudsman

0800 917 4487
pensions-ombudsman.org.uk

Finding a financial adviser

Retirement adviser directory

All of the advisers listed are authorised and regulated to provide advice by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Use our online Retirement Adviser Directory at
moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-adviser-directory

Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)

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

Consumer helpline: 0800 111 6768
Typetalk: (18001) 0207 066 1000
fca.org.uk/register

Pension information and advice

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

Pension Wise

A free service from MoneyHelper providing impartial guidance about your options for taking money from your pension pot.
0800 138 3944
moneyhelper.org.uk/pensionwise

To qualify for an appointment, you must be 50 years old or over and have a defined contribution pension. You also qualify if you're under 50 with ill-health or an inherited defined contribution pension pot.

- Our booking lines are open 8am to 6.30pm, Monday to Friday
- We'll send you an email to confirm your appointment.

GOV.UK

For information about State Pensions and how to find a lost pension.

State Pension forecast
0800 731 0469
gov.uk/check-state-pension

Claiming State Pension
0800 731 7898
gov.uk/state-pension

Deferring State Pension
0800 731 7898
gov.uk/deferring-state-pension

The Pension Tracing Service
0800 731 0193
gov.uk/find-pension-contact-details

Need more help?

Find a financial adviser with our
Retirement adviser directory

Our directory only contains details of regulated advisers – so you have peace of mind that you are fully protected. Choose to deal with your adviser in person, on the telephone or online.

It's up to you.

Find your financial adviser at
moneyhelper.org.uk/retirement-directory

Your pension: your choices is one of the guides available from MoneyHelper. This publication is available in Welsh. To see this and our full range of guides and request copies visit **moneyhelper.org.uk/free-printed-guides**

MoneyHelper*

Money guidance **0800 138 7777**
Mon - Fri 8am to 6pm

Pensions guidance **0800 011 3797**
Mon - Fri 9am to 5pm

Typetalk **1800 1 0800 915 4622**
Mon - Fri 8am to 6pm

WhatsApp **+44 7701 342744**

Website **moneyhelper.org.uk**

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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 2024). These guides are reviewed once a year.

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

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