

# Efficient Tax Strategies and Important Tax Birthdays



Tax efficiency is the measure of how much an investment's return you keep after taxes. Knowing your tax bracket is a good starting point, however, today's tax code is quite complex. Understanding the tax code rules, managing how you generate income, choosing your investments with an eye on taxable income generation and properly utilizing potential tax deductions can help you become more tax efficient. In general, there are three major strategies that investors should consider when they are attempting to manage their federal income taxes.

1. **Managing Taxes** - Choosing the most appropriate investments for your situation is always your best choice. When considering your investment plan it is always helpful to keep an eye on taxes. For example, an investor can choose to place investments that generate the most taxable income in their tax-advantaged accounts. Tax efficient investments like municipal bonds or stocks you hold for long periods of time could generate lower tax bills than taxable bonds. Managing taxes can potentially help investors save money.

2. **Deferring Taxes** - A powerful strategy for many investors can be tax deferral. In the investment world, "tax deferred" refers to investments on which applicable taxes (typically income taxes and capital gains taxes) are paid at a future date instead of in the period in which they are incurred. One of the most popular forms of tax deferrals is the use of a retirement account. IRAs, 401(k)s, 403(b)s and SEP plans are some of the more common ways that investors save for retirement in a tax deferred account.

3. **Reducing Taxes** - Tax deferred accounts and even tax efficient investments may reduce your tax bill, but they do not eliminate taxes. There are a few strategies available to investors that potentially create income that generally do not generate federal taxes. The list includes certain municipal bonds, Roth IRAs and some college savings accounts.

Placing investments in the most tax efficient account may sound complex, but sometimes the choices are easier. For example, some assets like equities you hold for a long term (that qualify for capital gains treatment)

or municipal bonds may generate smaller tax bills than taxable bonds that generate ordinary income. You could consider holding those assets in a taxable account. While tax implications should not dictate your final decisions a qualified financial professional can keep you aware of their impact.

Currently, investors face a multi-dimensional tax system. There are seven different Federal ordinary income tax brackets (10%, 15%, 25%, 28%, 33%, 35% and 39.6%), three different capital gains tax brackets (0%, 15% and 20%), a 3.8% net investment tax income tax (NIIT), Personal Exemption Phaseout (PEP) and Pease limitations. Investors not considering the tax impacts of their financial decisions may end up keeping less than those who do.

**When it comes to taxes,  
don't procrastinate.**

Many taxpayers do not look at the tax implications of their investment holdings. If you spend some time up front thinking about tax planning, you can potentially maximize your opportunities and minimize your tax bill. A skilled financial professional can help with this process. Knowledge, strong organization and proper planning can help you comply with the tax laws and at the same time could allow you to take advantage of tax saving options. **If you have any questions regarding your situation, call us or bring them up during your next review.**

## Tax efficient strategies could include:

- Maximizing retirement accounts
- Charitable gifting
- Tax deferred and tax free accounts
- College saving accounts
- Roth IRA or Roth IRA conversions
- Tax loss harvesting to offset gains
- Matching investments with the right account type

## Some Important Tax Birthdays (starting at age 50)

<b>Age 50</b>	<b>Allows for catch-up contributions to retirement plans.</b>
<b>Age 55</b>	<b>Allows retirement plan distributions to terminated employees without the 10% penalty.</b>
<b>Age 59½</b>	<b>Allows distributions from an IRA, annuity, or other retirement plan without penalty.</b>
<b>Age 60 (if widowed)</b>	<b>Allows for start of widow/widower benefits from Social Security.</b>
<b>Age 62</b>	<b>Allows for starting early Social Security benefits.</b>
<b>Age 65</b>	<b>Allows for enrollment in Medicare and the government drug plan.</b>
<b>Age 65-67</b>	<b>Allows for full retirement benefits from Social Security (depending on your year of birth).</b>
<b>Age 70½</b>	<b>To avoid penalties, a mandatory required minimum distribution from retirement accounts must be taken no later than April 1<sup>st</sup> of the year following the year you turn age 70½.</b>

The table above contains some important tax birthdays (after the age of 50) that can dramatically affect your income taxes. It is very important that as you plan for or reach any of these milestone birthdays that you work with a qualified financial professional who can review your specific situation to determine what tax reduction strategies would be best for you.

### Here are more specifics on a few of those ages:

**Age 50:** If you are age 50 or older as of the end of the year, you can make an additional catch-up contribution to your 401(k) plan (up to \$6,000 for 2016), and Section 403(b) tax deferred annuity plan (up to \$6,000 for 2016). To do this you must first check to see that your plan permits catch-up contributions. You can also make an additional catch-up contribution (up to \$1,000) to a traditional IRA or Roth IRA.

**Age 55:** If you permanently leave your job for any reason after you turn age 55, you can receive distributions from your former employer's qualified retirement plans without being socked with a 10% premature withdrawal penalty tax. This is an exception to the general rule that distributions received before age 59 ½ are hit with a 10% penalty.

**Age 59½:** You can receive distributions from all types of tax-favored retirement plans and accounts (IRAs, 401(k)s, pensions, and the like) and from tax-deferred annuities without incurring the 10% premature withdrawal tax.

**Age 70½:** You generally must begin taking annual Required Minimum Distributions (RMD) from your tax-favored retirement accounts (traditional IRAs, SEP accounts, 401(k) accounts, and the like. However, you do not need to take any RMD from your Roth IRA). You

must calculate your minimum distribution and if you do not take out the minimum distribution, the difference between what you should have taken out and what you actually took out is usually subject to a 50% penalty!

These tax laws are very important because if you choose to ignore the RMD rules there can be dire consequences. Planning for this event is critical and provides a great opportunity to seek the advice of a knowledgeable professional. The IRS can assess a penalty tax equal to 50% of the shortfall between the amount that you should have withdrawn for the year and the amount that you actually took out. While these rules may seem simple, they are often more complex. For example, your first RMD is for the year you turn 70½. However, you can postpone taking out your first RMD until as late as April 1st of the following year. If you chose that option, however, you must take two RMDs in that following year (one by April 1st, which is for the previous year) plus another by Dec. 31st (which is the one for the current year). There's one more exception. If you're still working after reaching age 70 ½ and you don't own over 5% of the business that employs you, the tax law allows you to postpone taking any required minimum withdrawals from that employer's plans until after you've retired.

In today's highly complex and rapidly changing world, investors are faced with an incredible array of investment choices. Many financial advisors are happy to help you invest your hard-earned dollars, but that is only one part of achieving your overall financial goals. Choosing an advisor that is well versed in certain critical areas or working with someone who has access to other professionals that may coordinate those areas for them can be helpful as you reach each of these important tax birthdays. **If you have any questions on your situation call us or ask at your next review.**

# Interesting Tax Facts

- The Gettysburg Address is **269** words.
- The Declaration of Independence is **1,337** words.
- The Holy Bible is **773,000** words.
- Tax law has grown from 11,400 words in 1913 to over **7 million** words today.
- There are at least **480** different tax forms each with many pages of instructions.
- Even the easiest form, the 1040E, has **33** pages of instruction – all in fine print.
- American taxpayers spend **\$200 billion** and **5.4 billion hours** working to comply with federal taxes each year. That is more than it takes to produce every car, truck and van in the United States.

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**“The hardest thing in the world to understand is income tax.”**

Albert Einstein

## Unusual State Taxes

Alabama → **Playing Card Tax**

Arkansas → **Tattoo Tax**

Colorado → **Non-essential Food Tax**

Illinois → **Hard Candy Tax**

Kansas → **Hot Air Balloon Tax**

Maryland → **Toilet Flush Tax**

Maine → **Blueberry Tax**

Minnesota → **Fur Coat Tax**

New York → **Haunted House Tax**

Washington → **Dance Tax**



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