

10 Ways to Cut Your Health Care Costs

It's no secret health care can be expensive. In 2016, the national average reached a record high of \$10,345 per person in annual health care spending.¹ Deductibles and premiums are continuously on the rise while provider networks keep getting smaller. So where does that leave you? While there are some expenses you won't be able to avoid, you can become your own health care advocate when it comes to how and where you get care, which can help you save hundreds—or even thousands—of dollars.

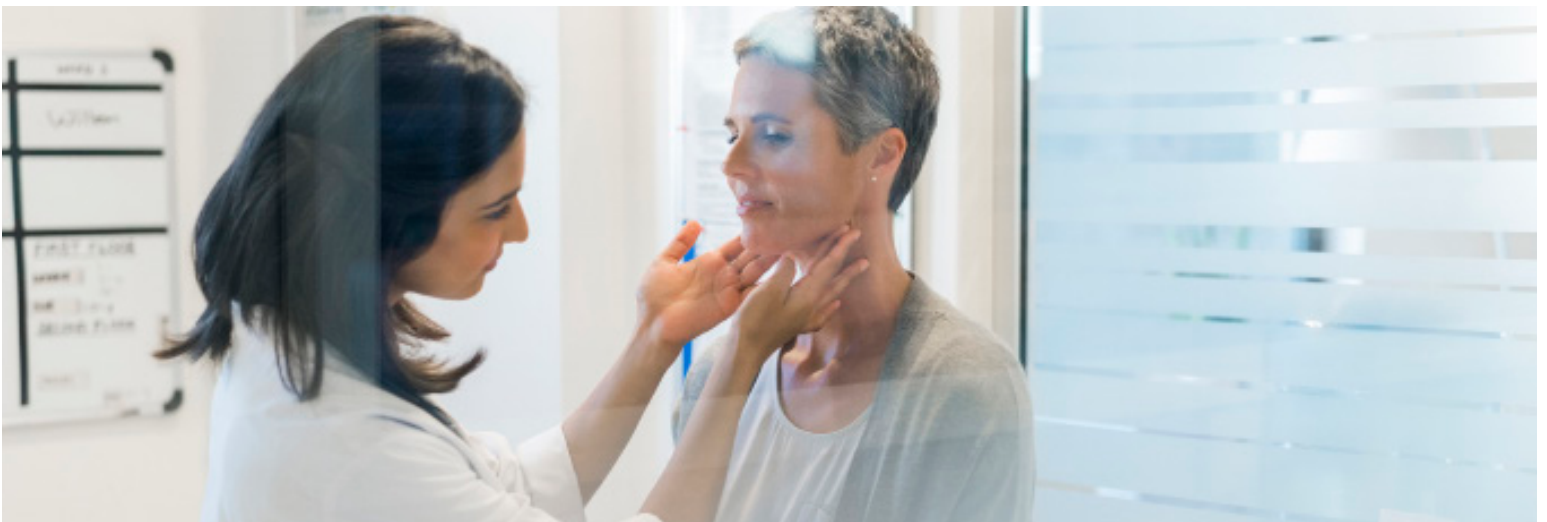
1 CHOOSE IN-NETWORK CARE

To save money, make sure the providers you see are in your network. For example, you could be paying as high as 50% co-payments or coinsurance rates for out-of-network care compared with 10%.

Your deductible and annual out-of-pocket expense limit may also be higher. So before you make your next appointment, ask your provider and the insurer if they're in your plan's network.

2 GET PREVENTIVE CARE—FOR FREE

The Affordable Care Act mandates that all insurers provide preventive care at no cost to you. Preventive services include diabetes and cholesterol tests, blood pressure checks, routine vaccines, well-baby and well-child visits, and mammograms (for details, see the preventive-care page at healthcare.gov).





3 IF IT'S NOT AN EMERGENCY, AVOID THE ER

Sometimes a trip to the ER is necessary. But many situations can be taken care of at a much less costly urgent care center or convenience care clinic. Urgent care centers are best for conditions like cold and flu symptoms, minor cuts, and urinary tract infections. Even less expensive are convenience care clinics at a retail store, supermarket, or pharmacy that can treat routine medical conditions. Not convinced? The average cost of an emergency visit is \$1,553, compared to \$135 for an urgent care center and \$58 for a convenience care clinic. Just be sure to know in advance which nearby clinics are in your network.

4 GET HELP BY PHONE, VIDEO, OR IN-PERSON FROM HOME

Your health plan may offer 24-hour help lines where you can speak to a doctor or nurse by phone or video. This option is best for non-emergency conditions like a sore throat or sinus pain. In some cases, you'll be prescribed medications. The average cost is \$40 to \$50.

If you prefer an in-person visit, several carriers now offer coverage for an on-demand house call service called Heal. According to their website, "Aetna, United Healthcare, Cigna, Blue Shield, and Anthem Blue Cross PPO members typically pay no more for a Heal house call than their regular doctor visit co-pay. Everyone else pays Heal's \$99 flat fee." Right now, it's available in limited areas, but will likely expand to more locations.

5 SWITCH TO GENERICS

Imagine paying only a fifth of your current medication costs. If you switch from brand-name drugs to generic drugs (which have the same active ingredients and are just as effective²), you can save as much as 80% with every purchase. Coinsurance is usually 10% to 15% of what you will pay for brand-name drugs, 25% for preferred brand-name drugs, and 50% for non-preferred brand-name drugs. Additionally, when your health plan no longer covers a specific brand-name drug, you can pay a fraction of the price for generics instead of covering the entire cost of the brand-name equivalent.

6 PICK A PREFERRED PHARMACY

See if your health plan offers a list of preferred pharmacies, which cost even less than regular in-network pharmacies. For example, your plan could charge a \$1 co-payment for a 30-day supply of certain generic drugs from Walmart or a \$10 co-payment for the same supply from a non-preferred network retail pharmacy.

7 GET YOUR DRUGS BY MAIL

Take advantage of mail-order pharmacies that offer the convenience of sending you a three-month supply to your home while helping you save. Sometimes, you can get a three-month supply of medication for the price of one month.

8 OPT FOR A CHEAPER FACILITY

Not all facilities charge the same, so while your doctor may be in-network, the costs will vary depending on which hospital he or she is performing the procedure in. If your physician works at several locations, ask which facility is cheaper and book your appointment there. For example, if your doctor is performing the same surgery at a hospital and at an outpatient surgery center, the latter will be much cheaper (considering both are in-network).

9 PAY IN CASH

If you're still paying toward your deductible, you may be able to get a discount for paying in cash. After making sure you're getting your insurer's negotiated rate, don't forget to submit the claim so that it counts toward the deductible.

10 GET INFORMED

Depending on where you get care, the same services have a wide price range. To view fair prices in your area, check out Healthcare Bluebook. Find out the cost of services before you get them and if you receive a much higher quote, talk to your doctor about it. They have a lot of say where you get your labs, imaging, etc. and can discuss options with you.

Content from Kiplinger article "50 Ways to Cut Your Health Care Costs" by Kimberly Lankford

1. Alonso-Zaldivar, R. (2016, July 13). \$10,345 per person: U.S. health care spending reaches new peak. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/new-peak-us-health-care-spending-10345-per-person/>
2. Center for Drug Evaluation and Research. (n.d.). Understanding Generic Drugs - Facts about Generic Drugs. Retrieved July 20, 2017, from <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/resourcesforyou/consumers/buyingusingmedicinesafely/understandinggenericdrugs/ucm167991.htm>