

Q&A

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How Can You Lose Weight And Save Money At The Same Time?

(NAPSA)—One way to save money while achieving a healthy weight may be to open a pretax health account.

That's because some weight-loss expenses can be paid for with pretax dollars.

For example, if a doctor prescribes a weight-loss program such as Weight Watchers® to treat a specific disease (such as obesity, hypertension or heart disease), the IRS may allow that person to use his or her pretax account to pay with tax-free dollars.

Obesity has also been linked to a shortened life expectancy. In 2002, a study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* reported that people who are 30 or more pounds overweight shorten their lives by up to seven years. Even carrying an extra 10 to 30 pounds could shorten a person's life span by three years.

Q: Are all weight-loss programs allowable expenses to be paid from a pretax account?

A: Fees for membership in a weight-loss group and attendance at periodic meetings may be reimbursable expenses if they are for treatment for a specific disease diagnosed by a physician. However, weight-loss services to improve appearance, general health and sense of well-being may not be deducted.

Q: What do I need to get reimbursed?

A: IRS Publication 502 gives an example of recordkeeping suggested for taxpayers, but generally you should document 1) what medical care was received, 2) the name and address of each person you paid, 3) the amount and date of each payment and 4) the nature and purpose of any other medical expenses. Consult your tax advi-



Since losing weight can help extend life, attending weight-loss programs may qualify as a pretax medical expense.

sor or visit www.irs.gov to verify what records to keep.

Q: Is it easy to get reimbursed?

A: The terms of the type of pretax account you have will dictate what you need for reimbursement. For your tax return, generally, you do not have to submit documentation; however, you should keep such documentation in case any questions arise.

Q: What is the benefit of using a pretax health savings account?

A: Using a pretax account allows you to save money in your account on a pretax basis, for eligible expenditures. You then “pay yourself back” using funds saved in your account.

Q: How can I learn more about using my pretax health savings account for a weight-loss plan?

A: Ask your Human Resources department about Open Enrollment to ensure that you allocate funds for a weight-loss program.

- Go to www.irs.gov to learn more or ask your tax advisor for guidance.