



Our SIPP risk warnings

Member retirement



Introduction

Over recent years there have been changes to pension rules, these have given you more options at retirement. With these changes to the rules, long gone are the days when you'd have no choice but to purchase an annuity. With the introduction of pension freedoms in 2015 you have more control of when and how you access your pension.

However, with the greater options and flexibility at retirement brings potential risks that you should consider before making decisions about how you access your pension benefits. Although this guide is here to provide you with information on the options available to you within the SIPP, we are unable to provide you with advice.

If you are not sure which option is best for you, you can seek guidance from Pension Wise - this is a free and impartial guidance service available to you once you are 50 or over, they can help you understand the different ways you can take your pension benefits.

It's available online at www.pensionwise.gov.uk and they provide appointments over the phone or in person, call **0800 138 3944** or go to www.pensionwise.gov.uk to book your appointment or Options Pensions can book the appointment on your behalf.

Their guidance is impartial, they won't recommend any products or companies and they won't tell you how to invest your money.

If you choose not to seek advice or guidance in relation to the benefit options available to you, we suggest that you read the Money Helper guide: **Your Pension: your choices** which is available to download and view on their website.

The Money Helper Service is an independent service, set up by the government to help people make the most of their money.

They give free, unbiased money advice to everyone across the UK – online at www.moneyhelper.org.uk, over the phone call **0800 011 3797** and through webchat.



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Tel: +44 203 733 3595 (if you are outside the UK)
www.Pensionwise.gov.uk



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As we can't give you advice, we would recommend that you contact a financial adviser, or Pension Wise to discuss your options further when you decide to access your pension benefits.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with information only on the risks involved with taking money out of your pension. Please take time to read this thoroughly and reflect on the contents. After reading this document, if you are unsure about your retirement decision, please refer to (or recontact) Pension Wise or your FCA regulated financial adviser for further guidance before proceeding. It is important that you are certain before taking your pension benefits.

When you access your pension savings we'll send you a personal 'taking benefits confirmation letter' that should be read together with this risk warning factsheet. This letter will highlight the relevant risk warnings that could affect you and it's based on the information you have provided to us when you completed the retirement key facts questionnaire. The information we provide you in the letter is for information purposes only and should not be taken as advice. Please read all the information we have provided carefully, together with any information you have received from Pension Wise, the Money Helper Service, and/or your financial adviser. If you have any questions please call us on 0330 124 1505.

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ - Retirement risk warnings

Your dependents and sustainability of your retirement income

Your pension is designed to help financially support you in your retirement. This could be for a considerable length of time, therefore it's important that you make your pension fund last as long as possible. You do not need to take benefits at your nominated retirement date. You should consider if your current funds and investments are likely to provide you with the benefits you require when you retire, and how accessing benefits will affect the sustainability of your fund in the future.

If you spend your entire pension fund in the early years of retirement, you could have little or no money left to support your standard of living in later life. This is irreversible and could impact not only you, but also your family, should they be financially dependent on you.

Should you have no pension fund left, this can have a significant and negative impact on your standard of living in retirement and what you can or can't afford to do, particularly if you have minimal or no alternative sources of income.

It is important to note that if you reached State Pension age on or after 6 April 2022 you'll get the new State Pension. The full new State Pension payment is £203.85 a week for the current tax year 2023/24, though the actual amount you will receive will depend on your personal circumstances and your national insurance contributions record. More information on the State Pension can be found on the Government's websites <https://www.gov.uk/state-pension> and <https://www.gov.uk/new-state-pension>

Health

If you're suffering from ill health at the time of accessing your pension, you should seek guidance from Pension Wise or financial advice from an appropriately regulated financial adviser. Ill health could mean you can access your pension benefits early, or that you are eligible for ill health retirement options, such as enhanced/ill health annuities which could be in the form of a fixed term or lifetime income in exchange for a lump sum from your pension which takes into account your ill health.

If your main concern is to provide benefits for your dependents, the amount they will receive will be affected by the decision you make in relation to accessing your pension savings or leaving your pension as it is. Accessing your benefits before your nominated retirement date will affect your ability to fund income later in life or beyond for your dependents/beneficiaries.

Tax

When you access your pension, you can normally withdraw a lump sum of 25% of the value of your pension tax- free in the UK (although there is an upper cap set by the tax legislation). The remainder, whether withdrawn as lump sum(s) and/or regular income, will be taxed at the rate of income tax you pay. This means HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) will treat withdrawals as income for that tax year and will calculate the income tax you'll need to pay. You should take into account if you are receiving income from other sources e.g. employment or if you are taking a large value lump sum which could result in you paying a higher rate of tax.

For your information, the Income Tax Bands for England and Wales for the 2025/26 tax year are as follows (source: HMRC website):

Tax Band	Taxable income	Tax rate
Personal Allowance*	Up to £12,570	0%
Basic rate	£12,571 to £50,270	20%
Higher rate	£50,271 to £125,140	40%
Additional rate	over £125,140	45%

* Care should be taken if you receive income over £100,000 in the same tax year, because your standard personal allowance will be reduced and could be completely removed. The Personal Allowance goes down by £1 for every £2 of income above the £100,000 limit.

If you live in Scotland or Wales, the rates and bands are slightly different.

You should take guidance and/or advice about the tax implications of accessing your pension before proceeding. If you make the wrong decision, you could go into a higher tax bracket which means you will pay more income tax.

You have the flexibility to take money out of your pension all at once in a single tax year, or you can withdraw money in stages if you prefer, over several tax years.

Please note that each tax year runs from 6th April to 5th April the following year.

If you live outside the UK then your income may instead be taxable (and declarable) in the country you are resident in for tax purposes. In that case you may be able to apply to HMRC in the UK for the income to be paid free of UK income tax. The exact position will depend on whether there is a double taxation treaty between the UK and that country and the terms of that treaty.

We cannot provide you with any advice on the tax position in other countries outside the UK.

Tax (continued)

We can't provide advice on any matters, and that includes tax matters. We are required by HMRC to deduct income tax before paying your benefits to you in accordance with any tax codes they issue to us. If you have a query relating to a tax code HMRC has issued to us then you'll need to speak to HMRC directly as they will not discuss your tax matters with us.

The investments held in the SIPP may have benefitted from growing free of tax. Should you wish to reinvest your pension benefits personally elsewhere, the tax implications may be less favourable than if left in your pension pot.

Another implication for you to consider is that your benefits will fall under your estate when paid to you. This may impact on your inheritance tax planning, and you should seek financial advice for further information.

Inheritance tax

Currently, any funds remaining in your SIPP on your death are normally not included in your estate for inheritance tax ('IHT') purposes (although there are exceptions). Anything you draw from your SIPP will form part of your estate for IHT purposes (if not spent).

However, the government announced on 30th October 2024 that unused pension funds will form part of the estate for IHT purposes with effect from 6th April 2027. The final rules are not yet clear.

You should consider your estate planning as part of your retirement planning.

Can I change my mind?

Whilst you have a 30-day right to cancel the first time that you go into income drawdown, at the time of print there is material uncertainty over whether the lump sum element of your benefits is part of those cancellation rights. HMRC has recently announced that the lump sum cannot be returned under the tax rules (meaning that tax will become due unless an alternative pension is chosen by you within a set time limit). We will update our documentation when the position is settled upon.

As things currently stand, please be aware that there is uncertainty over whether your right to cancel is effectively enforceable, unless you delay drawing the lump sum part of your benefits until that cancellation period has run out.

Means tested state benefits

If you are in receipt of state benefits or any other source of financial support that are means tested, taking benefits from your pension could result in these being withdrawn if you hold over a certain amount in savings and investments. It is important that you seek the appropriate advice and guidance before accessing funds from your pension.

When you take money out of your pension, it becomes personal savings and this means it would be included in any calculations for means tested support. This could result in your benefits or financial support being reduced or completely withdrawn. Further guidance on this can be obtained from the Department for Work and Pensions. The staff at the Department will be able to explain the rules around the treatment of income and savings, in relation to your circumstances.

Further information is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions> and there is a factsheet produced by the Department for Work and Pensions titled 'Pension freedoms and DWP benefits'.

Long term care

As previously mentioned, when you take money out of your pension it is classified as personal savings. If (after taking your benefits) you need to go into long-term care, your local authority will take these personal savings into account when calculating the financial support that you may be entitled to. This could result in you having to make a larger contribution to your long-term care costs, or having to fund it entirely yourself.

Debts and bankruptcy

Once pension savings are paid to you and it's classified as personal savings, if you were to default on a debt or become bankrupt the creditors have a right to this money because it belongs to you.

Losing guarantees

If you are transferring from a company pension scheme, in particular a 'final salary' or 'defined benefit' pension, to provide you with more flexibility to access your pension savings, it is very important that you seek financial advice from an appropriately qualified financial adviser regulated by the UK financial services regulator (the Financial Conduct Authority) before proceeding.

By transferring out of your company pension scheme you could lose valuable benefits, such as a guaranteed level of pension income, guaranteed growth rates, bonuses (i.e. if invested in a 'With Profits' Fund), additional life cover and benefits for your family. Therefore, your position and retirement plans should be fully assessed by a professional and regulated adviser, prior to any transfer taking place.

Please note that in line with guidance from the Financial Conduct Authority, your pension provider will need to see evidence that you have sought advice before allowing the transfer of such pension schemes. If the value of your transfer is less than £30,000, this is at the discretion of the pension provider.

Further pension contributions

If you want to access your pension savings, but also want to continue to contribute to a pension, care should be taken and you should seek guidance and/or financial advice first. Depending on how you access your pension, this could reduce the maximum you are allowed to continue to save into a pension.

Accessing your pension may have the effect of reducing your effective annual allowance each tax year. This is the total amount of pension savings that can be made to all pension schemes in the tax year without triggering a tax charge.

Accessing income through flexi access drawdown or as an uncrystallised funds pension lump sum will normally effectively reduce your annual allowance under your SIPP and similar schemes from £60,000 to £10,000 (for the 2023/24 tax year onwards), with no 'carry forward' from previous tax years. This lower limit is called the money purchase annual allowance.

Care should be taken that you are not 'recycling' your pension lump sum money (that means taking it out of one pension to put into another) because this could incur a tax charge.

Charges and fees

There may be higher associated costs involved in buying and selling of investments if you are intending to reinvest your pension savings personally. You should consider the impact of these charges on your retirement fund.

Scams

When withdrawing your pension fund, you should be aware of scams, especially regarding what you do with the money afterwards and the charges involved with this. You should take appropriate guidance from Pension Wise or financial advice from a financial adviser regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority before proceeding.

Please be very cautious if you are approached by email, phone, text or in person about withdrawing your pension. To find out more, or to report a suspected scam, go to www.fca.org.uk/scamsmart or call us on 0330 124 1505 immediately.

Protection under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme

The underlying funds within the SIPP are protected under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS). Up to £85,000 held with each bank is protected (as at April 2020), and there may be protection for other funds depending on where the funds are invested. For further information on FSCS protection under the compensation scheme please visit: <https://www.fscs.org.uk/what-we-cover>

Shopping around

It is important to shop around and consider all the retirement options because other providers may offer products that are more appropriate to you and your circumstances.

This is particularly relevant if you are proceeding with buying an annuity, which is a guaranteed income in exchange for your pension fund. This is because annuity rates and costs can vary considerably between providers, particularly if you are a smoker and/or have health issues. You will need to take into account all of the different options available to you including, for example, whether you have an income, which increases with the cost of living.

It's your retirement and your choice, so please seek guidance and advice to find the best options for you.

If you don't currently have a financial adviser, but would like to speak to one, you can find one at <https://www.unbiased.co.uk>

If you choose not to seek advice or guidance in relation to the benefit options available to you, we would suggest that you read the Money Helper guide: Your Pension: your choices which is available to download and view on their website. The Money Helper Service is an independent service, set up by the government to help people make the most of their money. They give free, unbiased money advice to everyone across the UK – online www.moneyhelper.org.uk, over the phone call 0800 011 3797 and through webchat.

Investment Pathways

The Financial Conduct Authority introduced the Investment Pathways initiative in February 2021 to guide non-advised clients to make better informed decisions that align their retirement plans and objectives by using one of four ready tailored investment solutions. It applies to clients over the age of 55 with defined contribution pensions who want to move all or part of their pension into drawdown or want to transfer drawdown funds into another drawdown arrangement.

All clients can choose to select:

- an Investment Pathway offered by another firm by way of pension transfer
- investments without the use of Investment Pathways
- to remain invested in their current investments.

If you select option one, the below choices will be available to you from other providers that offer the Investment Pathway solutions based on your retirement objectives.

- **Option 1: I have no plans to touch my money in the next 5 years**
This option is for clients not intending to take any funds in the next five years and typically tend to have investments in long term balanced risk-controlled growth investments category.
- **Option 2: I plan to use my money to set up a guaranteed income (annuity) within the next 5 years**
This is designed to maintain annuity buying power for customers looking to buy in the short term.
- **Option 3: I plan to start taking my money as a long-term income within the next 5 years**
This aims for capital growth with a long-term income target. Taking too much too soon can result in not having enough funds for the future.
- **Option 4: I plan to take out all my money in the next 5 years**
This aims to preserve the value of your capital.

Options Pensions strongly recommends you take regulated financial advice or access the Pensions Wise Money Helper website for free impartial guidance on making your drawdown choices. The service is available to people over the age of 50 with a defined contribution personal pension plan and can assist with shopping around for the best choice for you, using tools such as the drawdown comparator.

The Pension Wise service can be accessed by www.moneyhelper.org.uk

For any of the Investment pathway options, the value of the fund can go up as well as down and you may get less than you originally invested.

You should also consider the risks of having more than half of your eligible income invested in 'cash-like' investments selected within the investment pathway. The value of your pot could be eroded by inflation over the long term.

We strongly recommend that you obtain regular advice from a regulated financial adviser or guidance from Pension Wise to determine whether your pension provision is on track to provide for you, financially, in retirement.



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