

Help465 Medicare Academy

Lesson 2: Your Medicare Choices

Medicare Advantage vs. Medicare Supplement

Estimated Time: 12–15 Minutes

Skill Level: Beginner–Intermediate

Welcome Back

Congratulations on completing Lesson 1.

Now that you understand the basics of Medicare, it's time to explore one of the biggest decisions most people face.

How do you want to receive your Medicare benefits?

Many people assume there's one "best" answer.

There isn't.

The right Medicare choice depends on your healthcare needs, your doctors, your prescriptions, your lifestyle, and your personal preferences.

Today's lesson will help you understand your options so you can compare them with confidence.

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you'll be able to:

- ✓ Explain the difference between Medicare Advantage and Medicare Supplement.
- ✓ Understand how each option works.

- ✓ Recognize the advantages and tradeoffs of each approach.
 - ✓ Identify the questions you should ask before making a decision.
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Two Different Paths

One of the easiest ways to understand Medicare is to think of it as two different roads leading to the same destination.

Both roads provide Medicare-covered benefits.

They simply take different routes.

Path One

Original Medicare

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(Optional) Medicare Supplement

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(Optional) Prescription Drug Plan

Path Two

Medicare Advantage

Many Medicare Advantage plans combine hospital, medical, and prescription drug coverage into one plan.

Some also include additional benefits like dental, vision, hearing, and fitness memberships.

Neither road is automatically better.

The goal is choosing the one that fits your journey.

Medicare Minute

The best Medicare plan isn't the one your neighbor chose.

It's the one that best supports **your** healthcare needs.

Original Medicare + Medicare Supplement

Some people prefer Original Medicare because it generally offers broad provider flexibility.

Many beneficiaries also purchase a Medicare Supplement plan to help pay certain out-of-pocket costs that Original Medicare doesn't fully cover.

Because Medicare Supplement plans usually don't include prescription drug coverage, many people also enroll in a separate Medicare Part D Prescription Drug Plan.

This approach is often attractive to people who value flexibility and predictable healthcare costs.

Medicare Advantage

Medicare Advantage plans are offered by private insurance companies approved by Medicare.

Instead of receiving your Medicare-covered benefits directly through Original Medicare, you receive them through the Medicare Advantage plan.

Many plans combine several benefits into one package and may include:

- Prescription drug coverage
- Routine dental benefits
- Vision benefits
- Hearing benefits
- Fitness memberships
- Other supplemental benefits

Benefits vary depending on the plan and where you live.

Comparing the Two

Provider Choice

If keeping your current doctors is important, checking provider participation should be one of your first steps.

Many Medicare Advantage plans use provider networks.

Medicare Supplement plans generally allow you to receive care from providers nationwide who accept Medicare.

Monthly Costs

Many Medicare Advantage plans have low or even \$0 monthly plan premiums (although you generally continue paying your Medicare Part B premium).

Medicare Supplement plans usually have higher monthly premiums.

However, comparing monthly premiums alone rarely tells the whole story.

Healthcare Costs

Many Medicare Advantage plans involve copayments or coinsurance when you receive care.

Medicare Supplement plans are designed to help reduce many Medicare cost-sharing expenses, creating greater predictability for many beneficiaries.

Extra Benefits

Many Medicare Advantage plans include routine dental, vision, hearing, and fitness benefits.

Medicare Supplement plans generally focus on helping pay Medicare cost-sharing rather than providing routine extra benefits.

Help465 Heads-Up 

Choosing a Medicare plan based only on dental benefits or television advertisements can cause people to overlook much more important considerations like doctors, prescriptions, provider access, and total healthcare costs.

Which Option Might Fit Your Lifestyle?

Medicare Advantage may appeal to you if:

- ✓ You like having many benefits combined into one plan.
 - ✓ You're comfortable using a provider network.
 - ✓ Additional benefits such as dental and vision are important to you.
 - ✓ You appreciate having an annual maximum out-of-pocket limit for covered medical expenses.
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Medicare Supplement may appeal to you if:

- ✓ You value provider flexibility.
- ✓ You travel frequently.
- ✓ You prefer more predictable healthcare costs.
- ✓ You're comfortable purchasing a separate Prescription Drug Plan.

These aren't rules.

They're simply considerations that can help guide your thinking.

Myth vs. Fact

Myth: Medicare Advantage is always better because it includes more benefits.

Fact: Extra benefits can be valuable, but they're only one part of the decision.

Your doctors, prescriptions, expected healthcare needs, travel habits, and overall costs often matter even more.

Helpful Medicare Terms

Original Medicare — Medicare Part A and Part B provided by the federal government.

Medicare Advantage — A private Medicare-approved health plan that provides your Medicare-covered benefits.

Medicare Supplement (Medigap) — Private insurance that helps pay certain out-of-pocket costs associated with Original Medicare.

Network — The group of doctors, hospitals, and healthcare providers contracted with a particular health plan.

Quick Knowledge Check

1.

True or False?

Medicare Advantage and Medicare Supplement are the same thing.

Answer: False.

2.

Which option generally works alongside Original Medicare?

☐ Medicare Supplement

☐ Medicare Advantage

Answer: Medicare Supplement.

3.

Which option often includes prescription drug coverage?

- ☐ Many Medicare Advantage plans
- ☐ All Medicare Supplement plans

Answer: Many Medicare Advantage plans.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about your own healthcare.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Ask yourself:

- Are my current doctors important to me?
- Do I travel frequently?
- Would I rather have lower monthly premiums or more predictable healthcare costs?
- Which extra benefits matter most to me?
- What questions do I still have?

Write your answers down.

We'll continue building on them throughout the Academy.

What You Learned

Today you learned:

- ☒ The two primary ways people receive Medicare benefits.
- ☒ How Medicare Advantage works.
- ☒ How Medicare Supplement works.
- ☒ The major differences between the two.

✓ How to begin comparing your own priorities.

Continue to Lesson 3

Seven Medicare Mistakes That Could Cost You Money

Now that you understand your Medicare choices, it's time to learn how to avoid some of the most common mistakes people make before enrolling.

A few minutes of preparation today can save significant time, money, and frustration later.

Remember...

The goal isn't choosing the "best" Medicare plan.

The goal is choosing the plan that's best for **you**.

That's the difference between selling Medicare...

...and understanding Medicare.