

Required Minimum IRA Distributions



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Overview

The IRS released regulations in 2002 that substantially simplify rules for required minimum distributions (RMD) from IRAs.

- There are new life expectancy tables that allow smaller distributions to be taken over a longer period.
- The calculation of the RMD has been simplified by eliminating certain variables.
- Rules regarding separate accounts with different beneficiaries have been clarified.
- Some flexibility is now available to change beneficiaries and split accounts, allowing the heirs to retain more of the tax-deferred income for a longer period of time.

Beginning Date Requirements

IRA owners must take at least a minimum amount from their IRA each year, starting with the year they reach age 70½.

If a taxpayer fails to take a distribution in the year they reach 70½, they can avoid a penalty by taking that distribution no later than April 1 of the following year. However, that means the IRA owner must take two distributions in the following year, one for the year in which they reached age 70½ and one for the current year.

If an IRA owner dies after reaching age 70½, but before April 1 of the next year, no minimum distribution is required because death occurred before the required beginning date.

Multiple IRA Accounts

For purposes of determining the minimum distribution, all Traditional IRA accounts owned by an individual are treated as one, and the minimum distribution can be taken from any combination of the accounts. If the owner chooses not to take the minimum distribution from each account, it is not uncommon for IRA trustees to require written certification that the owner took the minimum distribution from other accounts.

Determining the Distribution

The minimum amount that must be withdrawn in a particular year is the total value of all IRA accounts divided by the number of years the IRA owner is expected to live.

$$\frac{\text{TOTAL VALUE}}{\text{DISTRIBUTION PERIOD}} = \text{MINIMUM DISTRIBUTION}$$

- **Determining Total Value:** The total value is based on the sum of the value of all the owner's accounts at the end of the business day on Dec. 31 of the PRIOR year. Generally, IRA account trustees will provide this information on the year-end statements or on IRS Form 5498.
- **Determining the Distribution Period:** The IRS provides two tables for use in determining the IRA owner's life expectancy (referred to as "distribution period" by the IRS). Generally, IRA owners will use the "Uniform Lifetime Table" to determine their "distribution period." If the IRA owner's spouse is the sole beneficiary (on all the IRA accounts), the Joint and Last Survivor Table may be used. However, the Uniform Lifetime Table will always produce the smallest minimum distribution, unless the spouse is more than 10 years younger than the IRA account owner. *Example: The IRA owner is 75 and from the "Uniform Lifetime Table," the owner's life expectancy is 22.9 years.*
- **Determining Age:** Use the owner's oldest attained age for the year of the distribution.

***Example:** Suppose an IRA owner takes a distribution in February, when the owner's age is 74, but later in November, he turns 75. For purposes of determining the owner's life expectancy, the oldest attained age for the year, 75, would be used in computing the minimum distribution. The same rule is used for the spouse beneficiary, if applicable.*

***Example:** The IRA account owner is age 75 and the owner's spouse, who is the sole beneficiary of the accounts, is age 72. Since the spouse is less than 10 years younger than the IRA account owner, the Uniform Lifetime Table will produce the smallest*

required distribution. From the table, we determine the owner's life expectancy to be 22.9. The owner has three IRA accounts with a combined value of \$87,000 at the end of the prior year. The minimum distribution is \$3,799 (\$87,000 / 22.9).

Timing of the Distribution

The minimum distribution computation determines the amount that must be withdrawn during the calendar year. The distributions can be taken all at once, sporadically, or in a series of installments (monthly, quarterly, etc.), as long as the total distributions for the year are at least the minimum required amount.

Amounts that must be distributed (required distributions) during a particular year are not eligible for rollover treatment.

Maximum Distribution

There is no maximum limit on distributions from a Traditional IRA, and as much can be withdrawn as the owner wishes. However, if more than the required distribution is taken in a particular year, the excess cannot be applied toward the minimum required amounts for future years.

Underdistribution Penalty

Distributions that are less than the required minimum distribution for the year are subject to a 50% excise tax (excess accumulation penalty) for that year on the amount not distributed as required.

***Example:** The owner's required minimum distribution for the calendar year was \$10,000, but the owner only withdrew \$4,000. The excess accumulation penalty is \$3,000, computed as follows: 50% of (\$10,000 - \$4,000).*

If the failure to withdraw the minimum amount or part of the minimum amount was due to reasonable error, and the owner has taken, or is taking, steps to remedy the insufficient distribution, the owner can request that the penalty be excused. However, the penalty must first be assessed and then refunded by the IRS if the request is approved.

Not Required To File

Even though the IRA owner is not required to file a tax return, they are still subject to the minimum required distribution rules and could be liable for the underdistribution penalty even if no income tax would have been due on the underdistribution.

Death of the IRA Owner

If the IRA owner dies on or after the required distribution beginning date, a distribution must be made in the year of death, as if the IRA owner had lived the entire year. If the distribution is after the owner's death, the minimum amount must be distributed to a beneficiary.

Beneficiary Distributions

When an IRA owner dies after beginning the required distributions, and the beneficiary is an individual, the beneficiary must begin taking distributions the year after the IRA owner's death as follows:

Spouse as Sole Beneficiary: The IRS permits a sole beneficiary spouse far more options than it does other beneficiaries. When the spouse is the sole beneficiary, the spouse has the following options:

- Convert the IRA to his/her own account, thereby delaying additional distributions until he/she reaches age 70½.
- Or, if already age 70½, convert the IRA to his/her own account and begin taking RMD based on his/her attained age using the Uniform Distribution Table.
- Treat the IRA as if it were his/her own, frequently referred to as recharacterizing the IRA to a "Beneficial IRA" and naming new beneficiaries. The spouse must begin taking minimum distributions in the year following the owner's death based on his/her life expectancy using the Single Life Table. Distributions from Beneficial IRAs are not subject to the premature distribution penalties. Later, after he/she are no longer subject to the premature distribution penalty, the IRA can be converted as his/her own and he/she can choose to stop taking distributions until age 70½.