2026 Retirement Tax Checklist

Key Questions for Individuals Age 55+ to Reduce Lifetime Taxes for You & the Next Generation



These questions help uncover where higher taxes may be quietly building — and where timely planning could reduce taxes over your lifetime and beyond, including for your beneficiaries.

1. Are You Exposed to Higher Future Tax Rates?

- ☐ Do you know how much of your retirement savings will be taxable in the future?
- ☐ If tax rates rise, which of your accounts would be affected first?

>> **Why this matters:** Concentration in tax-deferred accounts can create a large, unavoidable tax bill later, and unused lower tax brackets today are lost forever.

2. Are You Using the Years Before Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs)?

- ☐ How many years do you have before RMDs begin?
- ☐ Are you taking advantage of those years to reduce future taxes?

>> **Why this matters:** Once RMDs begin, they must be taken first and permanently limit future options.

3. Will Your Retirement Accounts Create a Tax Problem for Your Heirs?

- ☐ Do your beneficiaries understand the 10-year rule for inherited retirement accounts — and how timing can affect taxes?
- ☐ Are any retirement accounts left to a trust that may no longer work as intended under today's rules?

>> **Why this matters:** Decisions made today determine whether taxes are spread over time, or concentrated into a short window for heirs. Some retirement assets create much larger tax bills after death than expected.

4. Are Roth Conversions Being Considered at the Right Time?

- ☐ Have you evaluated whether converting some retirement savings to Roth makes sense today?
- ☐ How could conversions affect future taxes, RMDs, or your beneficiaries?

>> **Why this matters:** Paying tax at known rates can reduce uncertainty and future tax surprises.

5. Are You Giving to Charity in the Most Tax-Efficient Way?

- ☐ If you give to charity, are you using the most tax-efficient assets to do so?
- ☐ Could charitable gifts reduce future required distributions and taxes?

>> **Why this matters:** Some charitable gifts can be made with little or no tax cost and can reduce your taxes now and in the future, if done correctly.

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6. Do 2026 Tax Rule Changes Affect You?

- ☐ Will changes to retirement contribution rules affect how your future contributions are taxed?
- ☐ Are you assuming catch-up contributions will still receive the same tax treatment as in prior years?

>> **Why this matters:** Some retirement contribution rules change beginning in 2026. Assuming prior tax treatment still applies could lead to higher taxes or missed opportunities.

7. If You Own a Business, Are Tax Strategies Coordinated?

- ☐ Could retirement tax decisions affect valuable business deductions or credits?
- ☐ Have recent tax law changes, such as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), altered how your business and retirement strategies interact?

>> **Why this matters:** One tax move can quietly reduce the benefit of another if business and retirement strategies aren't coordinated.

8. Are You Prepared for the "Widow's Penalty"?

- ☐ After your spouse passes, how will your taxes change on the same income?
- ☐ Could planning now reduce future tax pressure on the surviving spouse?

>> **Why this matters:** Many surviving spouses face significantly higher taxes, not because income increases, but because filing status changes.

The Big Takeaway

Tax planning today isn't just about following the rules ***— it's about timing, coordination, and using opportunities before they disappear***. If these questions raised uncertainty, it may be worth reviewing your strategy before taxes make the decision for you.

If these questions highlighted potential tax risks or missed opportunities, a conversation with a retirement tax–trained advisor could help clarify your next steps.

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Important: ***This checklist is for education and discussion only.*** Tax outcomes depend on individual circumstances, timing, and multiple tax laws. Because rules are complex and subject to change, many people choose to review decisions with a financial professional who has specialized training in retirement tax planning.

About Ed Slott and Company | America's IRA Experts

Built on more than 20 years of trusted retirement tax education. Ed Slott and Company provides advanced retirement tax training to financial advisors nationwide and develops educational resources to help retirement savers better understand how today's tax rules may affect their lifetime income.

You've worked hard to build your retirement.

Coordinated tax planning can help you ***have more, keep more, and make it last.***

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