Retirement Savings Guide

There is no question about it, saving for retirement should be one of your primary financial planning objectives. After all, with increased life expectancies you could be spending a third of your lifetime in retirement. While that period of your life may still be a few years away, it is crucial that you accumulate significant retirement savings during your prime working years. More and more Canadians are quickly coming to realize that they should be taking steps now to ensure their own personal financial independence in retirement.

Ottawa introduced the Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) in 1957 to give Canadians more incentive to save for retirement. Because of the preferential tax treatment that it receives, an RRSP is a highly effective way to build a pool of assets for retirement. An RRSP allows you to defer taxes on some of your earned income. In fact, you can effectively achieve a “tax-free rollover” of income to your RRSP because you are allowed a tax deduction for your RRSP contribution. Furthermore, as long as your funds remain within your RRSP, investment returns are not taxable. This may not seem like a great benefit over one or two years, but over the long term, tax-free compounding of investment returns can add up to a tremendous advantage.

A Tax-Effective Way To Save For Your Retirement

Assume you have $5,000 per year of pre-tax income available for investment over 30 years, you are in a 40 percent tax bracket, and your investments earn eight percent.

Investing In An RRSP: Assume you start with $5,000 of pre-tax income and you claim an offsetting $5,000 RRSP deduction to end up with $5,000 after tax.

$5,000 per year at a tax-sheltered return of eight percent over 30 years	$566,416
Less tax on the full amount at 40 percent	$226,566
Your after-tax capital at the end of the 30 years	$339,850

Investing Outside Of An RRSP: Assume you start with $5,000 of pre-tax income and you pay tax at 40 percent to be left with $3,000 after tax.

After-tax capital at the end of 30 years after $3,000 per year at an after-tax return of 4.8 percent	$192,605
The RRSP Advantage	**$147,245**

This example is for illustrative purposes only and assume a constant rate of return

The High Cost Of Delay

Investing $5,000 per year in your RRSP at eight percent:

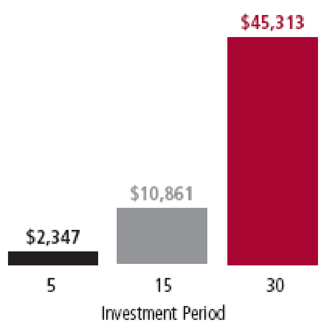
Over 30 years grows to: $566,416

Over 25 years grows to: $365,530

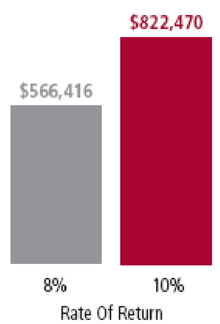
The cost of delay: $200,886

Invest Early In The Year

$5,000 per year invested in your RRSP at beginning versus end of year at an eight percent return.



Investing $5,000 Per Year In Your RRSP For 30 Years



Contributions

Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) Notice of Assessment, which follows your annual tax return, should indicate your allowable RRSP contribution limit including any unused RRSP contribution room since 1991 (see "RRSP Carry Forward"). If your Notice of Assessment has been misplaced, contact Canada Revenue Services (CRA) to obtain the required information, or access your personal tax information online through CRA's website (www.cra-arc.gc.ca).

RRSP Carry Forward

Starting with your 1991 contribution limit, you can carry forward unused RRSP contribution room indefinitely. Despite this carry forward provision, you should always make your maximum annual RRSP contribution, if possible, even if you do not wish to use the tax deduction until a future year (see below). If you miss contributions now, you may not be able to catch up later. In addition, you will be delaying the opportunity to earn tax-free compounding returns. Unfortunately, the carry forward provision does not apply to retiring allowance rollovers.

Contribution Age Limit

Providing you have RRSP contribution room available, you can contribute to your RRSP up until December 31st of the year in which you turn age 71. If you are over 71 but your spouse is not, you can direct any eligible contributions to a Spousal RRSP up until December 31st of the year your spouse turns 71. After the end of the year in which you turn 71, you must convert your RRSP to a maturity vehicle that provides retirement income.

Contribution Deadline For Tax Purposes

Each year, your RRSP contribution room is updated based on your previous year's income. In order to be eligible to claim a tax deduction for RRSP contributions, the contribution must be made during the calendar year or within the first 60 days of the following calendar year. For example, if your RRSP contribution room for 2011 is $22,450 and you want to claim a tax deduction for this amount on your 2011 income tax return, you have to contribute to your RRSP between January 1, 2011 and February 29, 2012. If you turn 71 in 2011, you cannot contribute to your RRSP after December 31, 2011.

Contribute Now And Carry The Tax Deduction Forward

Many people do not realize that you can contribute up to your RRSP contribution limit in any given year without using the tax deduction for that year. In other words, you can contribute now and immediately benefit from the tax-free compounding of investment returns, but defer the tax deduction to a future year when it might be more advantageous.

Note: Your total RRSP contribution limit includes any unused RRSP contribution room from previous years.

To estimate your RRSP contribution limit for a particular tax year:

- Take the lesser of A and B:

  A. 18 percent of the previous year's earned income

  B. The maximum annual contribution limit ($22,450 for 2011)
- If you are a member of a Registered Pension Plan or Deferred Profit Sharing Plan, subtract the previous year's Pension Adjustment (PA) and Past Service Pension Adjustment (PSPA).
- Add any applicable Pension Adjustment Reversal (PAR).

Types Of Contributions

Pre-Authorized Contribution Plan (PAC)

When you set up a PAC plan, you can automatically transfer funds from your bank account to your RRSP on a regular basis (e.g., monthly). A PAC plan makes it easy to contribute and is an effective way to implement a systematic savings program.

Borrowing To Make An RRSP Contribution

It may be worthwhile to borrow all or part of your RRSP contribution, especially if your investment returns will be greater than the cost of borrowing. However, any tax refund should be applied against the loan and you should repay the loan in full within one year. You cannot deduct any interest paid on money you borrowed to contribute to an RRSP.

“In Kind” RRSP Contributions

Instead of making a cash contribution to your RRSP, you may be able to contribute some non-registered securities that you already own. Providing you have a Self-Directed RRSP (see “Self-Directed RRSP”), you can contribute qualified investments (e.g., eligible mutual funds, T-Bills, GICs, common shares and bonds) and receive a tax deduction equal to the fair market value at the time of the contribution. When you contribute in kind, you are deemed to have sold the securities when the contribution is made and any accrued capital gains are taxable. Unfortunately, you cannot realize any capital losses for tax purposes, so you should not contribute “losers.” Your RRSP contribution slip for CRA will clearly indicate that the contribution is in kind not cash.

Swapping Non-Registered Securities For Cash In A Self-Directed RRSP

If you hold RRSP eligible securities outside of your RRSP and cash inside your RRSP, you can generally swap the securities for the cash. The cash you receive must equal the fair market value of the securities. The amount paid out of the RRSP to purchase your non-registered securities is not added to your taxable income and there is no tax withheld at source. Although a swap for cash is really a buy/sell transaction, you cannot realize any capital losses for tax purposes, even though accrued capital gains are taxable.

The $2,000 Overcontribution Limit

You are allowed to contribute and maintain up to $2,000 of overcontributions in your RRSP. This is a lifetime cumulative limit and is only available to those who have reached at least age 18 in the previous year. If you exceed the overcontribution limit, you will be subject to a one percent per month penalty tax on any excess amount. The $2,000 limit is designed to provide a margin for error in calculating RRSP contribution amounts.

You cannot claim a tax deduction if you make an overcontribution and the overcontribution amount will be taxed as income when withdrawn, but the tax-free compounded investment returns within your RRSP may compensate for the double taxation over the long term. If your overcontribution is withdrawn after only a short period of time, you will not receive any benefit to make up for the double taxation.

An amount can cease to be an overcontribution and can be claimed as a tax deduction when new RRSP contribution room comes into effect in a subsequent year. In future years, you can choose to absorb the overcontribution with new RRSP contribution room.

Withdrawing An “Accidental” Overcontribution Without Tax Consequences

When you withdraw an overcontribution to your RRSP, the withdrawn amount must still be included in taxable income, but it is effectively tax-free if you are allowed to claim an offsetting deduction by submitting Form T746, Calculating Your Deduction For Refund Of Unused Contributions. In order to claim an offsetting deduction, you must prove your case to CRA. You must show CRA that it is reasonable to consider that:

- You expected the full amount of the overcontribution to be deductible in either the year the contribution was made or in the preceding year **And**
- You did not make the overcontribution with the intent of subsequently withdrawing the contribution and claiming a tax deduction

Withholding tax on the withdrawal may be waived by submitting Form T3012A, Tax Deduction Waiver On The Refund Of Your RRSP Contributions, to CRA for advance approval. Where overcontribution penalties are accruing, a T3012A is not required.

RRSP Withdrawals

You can withdraw funds from your RRSP at any time, but a T4RSP tax slip will be issued and the withdrawn amount will be taxed as income for the year of withdrawal. Withholding taxes are also applied at the time of withdrawal (see “Withholding Tax At Source”) and you may owe additional money to the government when you file your income tax return, depending on your tax situation.

Withholding Tax At Source

Just as employers are required by law to keep back a percentage of tax on employees’ pay cheques (essentially a down payment of taxes), financial institutions are required to withhold tax at prescribed rates on withdrawals from RRSPs. However, the amount of tax you owe the government in April, or the refund the government owes you, is dependent on your total annual income situation.

Spousal RRSPs: An Income Splitting Opportunity

Any amount of your eligible Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) contribution room may be directed to a Spousal RRSP instead of your own RRSP. While the RRSP plan and its assets are owned and controlled by your spouse, you will be able to claim a tax deduction for the amount you contributed to the Spousal RRSP. Furthermore, your contribution to a Spousal RRSP will not affect your spouse’s ability to contribute to his or her own RRSP, based on their own personal contribution limit.

Please be aware that spousal contributions are governed by the three year withdrawal rule, under which any amounts withdrawn from the Spousal RRSP are taxable to the contributor, if any spousal contributions have been made in the year of withdrawal or in the two previous calendar years. This rule is designed to prevent short-term income splitting whereby the higher income spouse contributes to a spousal plan and the lower income spouse withdraws the funds immediately thereafter.

Three Year Withdrawal Rule

There is an “anti-avoidance” provision attached to spousal plans which is designed to prevent a higher income spouse from contributing to a spousal plan and having funds almost immediately withdrawn and taxed to the lower income spouse. Generally, this provision stipulates that amounts withdrawn from Spousal RRSPs are to be taxed to the contributor if any spousal contributions have been made in the year of the withdrawal or in the two previous calendar years. Because of this provision, funds from Spousal RRSPs and non-Spousal RRSPs should not be blended. The three year withdrawal rule does not apply if your spouse withdraws funds while you are living apart due to marriage breakdown.

If your spouse transfers funds from a Spousal RRSP to a RRIF, the RRIF becomes a spousal plan for tax purposes. Amounts that are withdrawn in excess of the annual minimum are subject to the three year withdrawal rule.

Note: The annual minimum is zero in the year a RRIF is set up. Any amount withdrawn in that year may be taxed to the contributor under the three year rule. CRA form T2205 is used to determine which spouse should be taxed on withdrawals from RRSPs and RRIFs.

Last calendar year that you made a contribution to a Spousal plan	First calendar year your spouse can withdraw funds without triggering attribution on the contribution amount
2008	2011
2009	2012
2010	2013
2011	2014
2012	2015
2013	2016

*The year you claimed a tax deduction for the contribution is not relevant.

Pension Income Splitting

A Canadian resident who receives income that qualifies for the existing pension income tax credit can allocate up to 50 percent of that income to their resident spouse or common-law partner. The pension income splitting legislation, which took effect in the 2007 tax year, enables a taxpayer to split this income with his/her lower-income spouse by filing a joint election on their personal income tax returns.

Individuals over the age of 65 may split income from the following sources with their spouse or common-law partner:

- Pension plans
- Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs)
- Life Income Funds (LIFs)
- Locked-In Retirement Income Funds (LRIFs)
- Prescribed Retirement Income Funds (PRIFs)
- Federal Restricted Life Income Funds (RLIFs)
- Annuities purchased with funds from a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) and Deferred Profit Sharing Plans (DPSPs)
- Taxable component of non-registered annuity payments

For those under the age of 65, only income from pension plans and some forms of annuity income, including income from a registered plan as the result of the death of a spouse, may be split with a spouse or common-law partner.

RRSPs At Death

An RRSP annuitant is deemed to have de-registered RRSP assets at fair market value at the time of his or her death. This generally results in additional taxes payable in the year of death. However, by naming a spouse or common-law partner (collectively, “the spouse”) or a financially dependent child or grandchild as the beneficiary of the RRSP, the full value of the account may be taxed in their hands and not added to the deceased’s final year income. This also eliminates the need for probate, or equivalent letters of administration or certificate of estate trustees, as applicable (probate is not applicable in Quebec).

When you designate your spouse as the beneficiary of your RRSP, the full value of the account will be passed directly to your spouse after your death. Whether your spouse is named as the beneficiary directly on your RRSP contract or you leave the RRSP to your spouse in your Will, he or she generally has two options:

- The RRSP assets can be rolled directly into his or her own RRSP or RRIF.
- Your spouse can withdraw the full amount of your RRSP in cash. The withdrawal amount must be added to your spouse’s income for the year and withholding taxes will apply.

If you name a financially dependent child or grandchild who has a mental or physical disability as the beneficiary of your RRSP, the assets can be rolled into the child’s RRSP. If the financially dependent child or grandchild is not disabled, RRSP assets cannot be rolled directly to his or her own RRSP; however, the assets can be taxed in the child’s hands or used to purchase a registered annuity that pays the amount to the child in installments until his or her 18^{th} birthday.

If you name someone other than a spouse or financially dependant child or grandchild as beneficiary, the beneficiary will receive the full value of the RRSP tax-free and without the requirement for probate. In this situation, the fair market value of your RRSP at the time of death will be taxable to your estate and must be added to your tax return for the year of death (your terminal return).

Leaving RRSP Assets To Heirs In Your Will

In most jurisdictions, if you leave RRSP assets to non-dependant children or others in your Will and the Will specifically designates such a person as the beneficiary of the RRSP, this is considered the equivalent to naming the individual as beneficiary on the RRSP contract, except that probate fees will apply. In this case, the beneficiary will receive the full value of the RRSP tax-free, but the fair market value of the RRSP at the time of death will be taxable to the estate.

If RRSP assets are left to non-dependent children or others under the general provisions of your Will and are not specifically designated as the beneficiary of the RRSP, the fair market value of the RRSP at the time of death will be taxable to the estate and added to your terminal return. RRSP assets will be distributed to the beneficiaries after taxes and any other applicable estate taxes are deducted. If the estate does not have cash available to cover the taxes payable, CRA is authorized to collect the taxes owing from the RRSP beneficiaries, pro-rated to the amount they will receive from the RRSP. It is important to note that an inequitable situation could arise when RRSP assets are left to one heir via a beneficiary designation and other assets are left to another heir via the Will.

Fair Market Value Of An RRSP At Death

As of January 2009, any decrease in the value of the RRSP after the annuitant's death can be carried back and deducted against the RRSP income inclusion on the deceased's terminal return. Previously, if the fair market value of an RRSP declined in value after the annuitant's death but before amounts were paid out to beneficiaries, the deceased was taxed on an amount greater than the amount actually received by heirs upon the windup of the RRSP.

Note: You are advised to seek professional tax and legal advice regarding the coordination of your Will and your beneficiary designations since there are many factors to be taken into account, including tax and family law considerations.

Retiring Allowance Rollover

At retirement or termination of employment, employees are typically offered some sort of severance payment. Severance paid out as a retiring allowance in respect of pre-1996 employment service receives special tax treatment. That is, subject to certain limits (see RRSP Quick Reference Summary), it will be eligible for tax-free rollover to your RRSP, but not to a Spousal RRSP. This special rollover does not affect your regular RRSP contribution room.

You can have your employer roll the funds directly to your RRSP, in which case, tax will not be withheld, or you can receive the money as cash and contribute it to your RRSP. However, if you wish to take advantage of the special tax treatment, you must contribute the funds to your RRSP within 60 days after the end of the year that the retiring allowance is received. (There is no carry forward allowed in this case.) For more information on retiring allowances, see our Special Report, Strategies For Dealing With An Early Retirement Package.

Pension Adjustment Reversal (PAR)

The 1997 federal budget introduced a Pension Adjustment Reversal (PAR) to restore lost RRSP contribution room. If you leave a Registered Pension Plan (RPP) or Deferred Profit Sharing Plan (DPSP) after 1996 and before retirement and you receive a commuted value that is less than the RRSP room given up while a plan member, a PAR should largely restore the RRSP room that otherwise would be lost forever.

Self-Directed RRSP

With some types of RRSP accounts, you are restricted in the types of investments you can hold. For instance, you may be limited to term deposits, guaranteed investment certificates (GICs) and certain mutual funds. A Self-Directed RRSP offers maximum flexibility and the broadest investment choice. This type of plan allows you to hold a wide range of securities (e.g., stocks, bonds and mutual funds) and gives you the ability to change the mix of investments to correspond with changes in age, risk posture, and economic climate.

Should Your Self-Directed RRSP Invest In Your Mortgage?

This may make sense if you believe the interest rate on your mortgage will outperform your potential return on other investments available for your RRSP. The RRSP mortgage must have normal commercial terms, including market interest rates, and it must be insured by the National Housing Act (NHA) or a public mortgage insurer. It is important to understand that there is no tax advantage to holding your own mortgage in a Self-Directed RRSP and you will remain obligated to make regular mortgage payments. Since there are set-up and legal fees in addition to annual administration fees, this strategy is usually only considered if the RRSP is fairly large (e.g., $100,000 or more).

The Home Buyers' Plan (HBP)

The HBP allows you to borrow up to $25,000 from your RRSP to buy or build a home. In order to participate in the HBP, you must complete form T1036, Applying to Withdraw an Amount Under the Home Buyer's Plan, for each withdrawal. Generally, you cannot participate in the HBP if you owned your principal residence in the past five years. If you have a spouse or common-law partner and you are both eligible for the plan, you can each withdraw up to $25,000 from your own RRSPs.

You are required to repay your RRSP over a period of 15 years, with payments starting two years after the year of withdrawal. As with RRSP contributions, you are allowed to make your repayment within the 60 days following the year end. Amounts contributed to your RRSP as HBP repayments are not eligible for a tax deduction and they do not affect your annual RRSP contribution limit. If you fail to repay the required amount when it is due, the amount must be added to your taxable income. You always have the option of repaying the funds withdrawn for the HBP sooner if you wish. It is also important to know that the amount of your RRSP contributions claimed as a deduction will be reduced by the amounts of contributions allocated to repay a HBP withdrawal.

If you withdraw funds from an RRSP under the Home Buyers' Plan within 89 days of contributing to the RRSP, part or all of your RRSP contribution may not be tax deductible. For more information on the Home Buyers' Plan, please refer to the CRA website at **www.cra-arc.gc.ca**.

The Lifelong Learning Plan (LLP)

The LLP allows you to withdraw up to $10,000 in a calendar year and up to $20,000 in total from your RRSPs to finance full-time training/education for you, or your spouse/common-law partner. In order to participate in the LLP, you must complete form RC96, Lifelong Learning Plan (LLP) Request to Withdraw Funds from an RRSP. As long as you meet the requirements of the LLP every year, you can withdraw amounts from your RRSP until January of the fourth year after the year you make your first LLP withdrawal. Generally, you are required to start repaying your LLP withdrawals at the beginning of the fifth year after your first LLP withdrawals and the second year after completing the qualifying educational program. However, in most cases, the repayments will start earlier than that. For more information on the Lifelong Learning Plan, please refer to the CRA website at **www.cra-arc.gc.ca**.

Your CIBC Wood Gundy Investment Advisor can help you understand all of your registered plan options and how you can benefit from RRSP contributions. Contact your Investment Advisor today to learn more.

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