



IR-2016-43: IRS Releases Tax Time Guide: Use IRS.gov Tools for Quicker Answers

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IRS Releases Tax Time Guide: Use IRS.gov Tools for Quicker Answers

WASHINGTON — With a month left before the tax deadline, the Internal Revenue Service today encouraged taxpayers working on their 2015 tax returns to take advantage of the numerous online tools and resources available on IRS.gov.

This is the first in a series of 10 IRS tips called the Tax Time Guide. These tips are designed to help taxpayers navigate common tax issues as this year's April 18 deadline approaches. It will offer taxpayers tips on how to get help along with important options and issues to keep in mind as the tax deadline approaches.

The IRS has a wide variety of easy-to-use, online tools on [IRS.gov](#). Through these, taxpayers can check the status of their refund, request a copy of their tax transcript or get an answer to their tax questions around the clock.

"We are doing everything we can to help taxpayers get the assistance they need this tax season," said IRS Commissioner John Koskinen. "[IRS.gov](#) and its online tools, such as the [Interactive Tax Assistant](#), can answer most taxpayer questions -- getting them the tax help they need, when they need it." IRS information and some tools also are in [Spanish](#).

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The [Interactive Tax Assistant](#) takes taxpayers through a series of questions and provides them with responses to tax law questions about credits, deductions and general filing issues. Taxpayers get the same answers as if they'd called and spoken with an IRS representative, and they can print out the answers for their records.

Here are some of the most common tax-related questions and the faster and easier ways to get answers:

Missing a 2015 tax refund?

Taxpayers can easily find information about their refund by using the [Where's My Refund?](#) tool. It's available on IRS.gov and on the official IRS app for smartphones, IRS2Go. Initial refund information is normally available within 24 hours after the IRS receives the taxpayer's e-filed return or four weeks after the taxpayer mails a paper return to the IRS. The system updates every 24 hours, so there's no need to check more often.

Need help preparing a tax return?

The [VITA/TCE Site Locator](#) enables low- and moderate-income taxpayers to find the nearest volunteer tax help site. Through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (VITA/TCE) programs, eligible taxpayers can get help filing their return for free at one of the more than 12,000 community-based tax help sites staffed by more than 90,000 volunteers. This includes claiming tax benefits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and meeting requirements under the [healthcare](#) law.

The [EITC Assistant](#) helps individuals find out if they qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit, a tax benefit that aids millions of low-and moderate-income workers and working families. If they qualify, this credit can increase the tax refund by up to \$6,242.

For do-it-yourselfers:

Taxpayers preparing their own return or looking for free tax preparation will find that [IRS.gov](#) provides answers to many tax questions in a user-friendly format. Taxpayers can start by clicking on the [Filing](#) tab on IRS.gov. It's the place to find important updates and information regarding return preparation and electronic filing options.

The IRS [Free File program](#), available at IRS.gov is offered by 13 tax software companies that make their brand-name

products available for free to the 70 percent of taxpayers who earned \$62,000 or less in 2015. Users generally answer simple questions in an interview format and the software does the hard work including finding the deductions, credits and exemptions for which the taxpayer qualifies. In addition, IRS.gov offers Free File Fillable Forms for households whose earnings are more than \$62,000 and are comfortable preparing their taxes.

Free File can also help taxpayers with [myRA](#), a new free, retirement savings account from the Treasury Department.

Taxpayers who have a myRA account may use Free File to deposit part or all of their tax refund into their myRA account. Just use [Form 8888](#) or follow the software product's instructions.

Need professional tax help?

Taxpayers may also use the searchable directory on IRS.gov to [find a tax professional](#) with credentials and select qualifications to help them prepare their return.

Need a tax return transcript? Plan ahead.

For those who need a copy of their tax return, the IRS can help. Transcripts are free and available for the most current tax year after the IRS has processed the return. They are also available for the past three tax years.

The quickest way to get a tax transcript is to use the [Get Transcript](#) application on IRS.gov. Taxpayers can click the *Get a Transcript by Mail* button to have a copy of their transcript mailed to the address the IRS has on file for them. It should be received within five to 10 days from the time the IRS receives their request.

How does the Health Care Law affect a tax return?

Individuals can check the [Affordable Care Act tax provisions page](#) for helpful information about how the health care law affects their return. The online resources provide answers to individual questions including what information returns taxpayers should expect to receive and what to do with them. There are also two useful tools available through the Interactive Tax Assistant:

- [Am I eligible to claim the Premium Tax Credit?](#)
- [Am I required to make an Individual Shared Responsibility Payment?](#)
- [Publication 5201](#), The Health Care Law and Your Taxes,

and [Publication 5187](#), Affordable Care Act: What You and Your Family Need to Know, provide a snapshot of ACA requirements.

Need immediate answers to tax law questions?

Have questions about what filing status means, whether to file a tax return or who can be claimed as a dependent? Besides the [Interactive Tax Assistant](#), try [Publication 17](#), Your Federal Income Tax, a comprehensive tax guide for individuals, or the [IRS Tax Map](#), which allows search by topic or keyword for single-point access to tax law information by subject.

Need to make a payment?

IRS [Direct Pay](#) offers taxpayers the fastest and easiest way to pay what they owe. Available through the [Pay Your Tax Bill](#) icon on IRS.gov, this free online system allows individuals to securely pay their tax bills or make quarterly estimated tax payments, directly from checking or savings accounts without any fees or pre-registration. See IRS.gov/Payments for information on this and other payment options.

Can't pay a tax bill?

For taxpayers whose concern is a tax bill they can't pay, the [Online Payment Agreement](#) tool can help them determine whether they qualify for an installment agreement with the IRS. For those whose tax obligation is even more serious, the [Offer in Compromise Pre-Qualifier](#) can help determine if they qualify for an offer in compromise, an agreement with the IRS that settles their tax liability for less than the full amount owed.

Questions about an amended return?

The "[Where's My Amended Return?](#)" tool provides the status of Form 1040X for the current year and up to three prior years. Allow up to three weeks after filing for initial status information and up to 16 weeks for processing.

What about tax withholding?

The [IRS Withholding Calculator](#) helps employees make sure the amount of income tax taken out of their pay is neither too high nor too low. This tool can be particularly useful to taxpayers who, after filling out their tax returns, find that the refund or balance due was higher than expected.

Make [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) the first stop to get faster help and answers to tax questions

In addition to various interactive tools, [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov) is the gateway to many more resources and answers about many tax matters. Try [Tax Topics](#), [Tax Trails](#), [Frequently Asked Questions](#), and the [IRS Tax Map](#).

Download [IRS2Go](#), the official IRS mobile app, for Android devices from the Google Play Store or IRS2Go for Apple devices from the App Store, or from Amazon. Use it to check refund status, make a tax payment, watch the IRS YouTube channel, find free tax preparation help, get IRS news as soon as it's released, subscribe to filing season updates or daily tax tips, and follow the IRS Twitter news feed, @IRSnews, to get the latest federal tax news, including information about tax law changes and important IRS programs.

Other tips in the Tax Time Guide series are available on [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov).

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