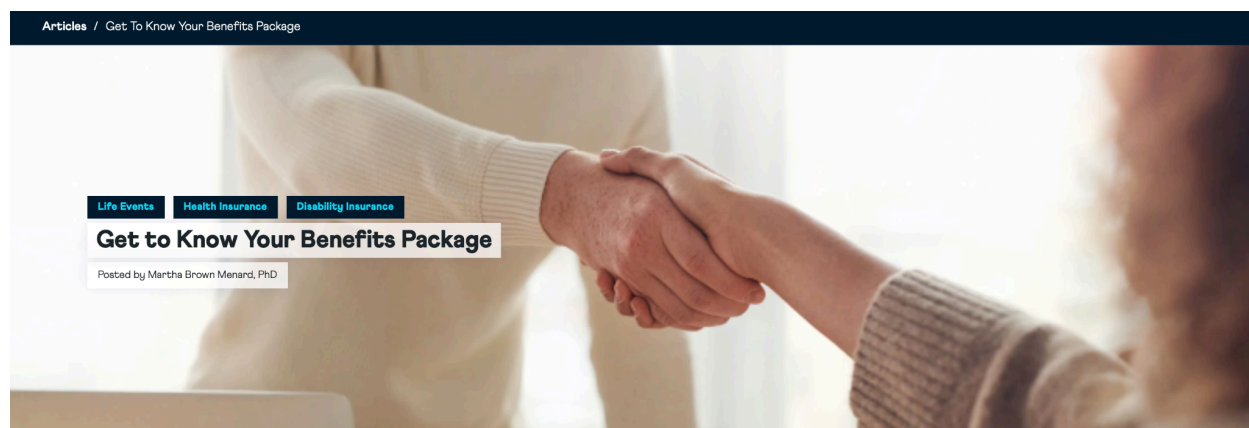


*\*\*article sample is hosted as a google doc as the Questis platform is private\*\**

## Get to Know Your Benefits Package



Whether you are searching for a job, deciding on an offer, or happily employed, it's important to review what benefit coverage is provided by the company and to decide whether its employee benefits package is one that fully meets your needs. It's important to take full advantage of what the company provides to you as an employee.

If you're new to the world of work, you may not be familiar with all the potential benefits your employer may offer. Employee benefits are non-salary compensation that vary from company to company. Employers offer employee benefits to attract new employees, retain their workforce, and boost productivity. A typical benefits package often includes health insurance, retirement planning, and paid time off. On average, benefits make up roughly [30%](#) of an employee's total compensation.

Some types of employee benefits are mandated by federal or state law, including minimum wage, overtime, leave under the Family Medical Leave Act, unemployment, and workers' compensation and disability insurance. In addition, there's non-wage compensation that can reduce your taxable income. These benefits might include employer-sponsored health insurance, paid time off, and retirement plans like 401(k)s.

In addition, you may find that a prospective employer is willing to offer other perks. These could include extras like paid gym memberships, phone and internet plans, free meals, or on-site child care. There are other types of employee benefits companies are not required to offer but that you may be able to negotiate these as part of your compensation package when you've been offered a new job.

What employers are required to provide

The following are compensation and benefits that employers are required to provide by federal or state law. Be sure to confirm what is required in your state.

### Consolidated Omni-Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)

The federal government requires that companies with 20 or more employees continue to provide extended medical benefits to former employees and their families for up to 18 months, and longer in some cases. Individual states may have additional requirements. Be sure to check your state for "mini-COBRA" laws that will protect you and your family if you should lose your job.

### Workers' Compensation and disability coverage

Both workers' compensation and disability help to ensure that an injured or sick employee continues to get paid at least a portion of their usual pay until they are well enough to return to work. Every state has its own workers' compensation and disability requirements for employers. While some businesses are exempt from providing workers' compensation, most payroll employees are eligible for it if they are injured on the job.

Only a few states require employers to provide disability coverage. However, many employers offer some version of this benefit to employees. Think of disability coverage as insurance for your income.

### Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)

The [Family and Medical Leave Act](#) requires some employers to provide 12 weeks of maternity, paternity, and adoption leave, but it isn't required to be paid leave. Most states have their own labor laws pertaining to family additions or medical issues that include paid leave. Beyond federal and state laws, some employers choose to be generous with paid leave for new mothers and fathers.

### Minimum wage

The current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour has not been raised since 2009. However, many states have their own minimum wage laws. The law stipulates that whichever minimum wage law is highest overrides the other. For example, Washington state's minimum wage is \$15.74, a higher rate of pay that would override federal minimum wage laws.

### Overtime

Similarly, overtime laws vary by state. The FLSA also stipulates overtime pay requirements. Whichever law (state or federal) benefits an employee the most takes precedence.

### Unemployment benefits

The federal government requires states to manage unemployment benefits for workers. If an employee worked a qualifying job and was laid off, they are entitled to

unemployment pay for a period of time. The amount of unemployment pay varies by state and earnings. Employees who resigned or were fired for misconduct are typically not eligible for unemployment benefits.

#### Types of employer-provided benefits and perks

In addition to benefits required by law, companies provide other benefits to attract and retain employees, and choose to offer them beyond the level required by law.

These benefits may include health insurance at smaller companies, dental insurance, vision care, life insurance, legal insurance, pet insurance, paid vacation leave, personal leave, sick leave, child care, fitness, retirement benefits and planning services, college debt relief, and other optional benefits offered to employees and their families. These kinds of employee benefits are offered at the discretion of the employer or are covered under a labor agreement, so they will vary from company to company. These may be included as voluntary benefits that the employee can choose to participate in and can have at a nominal cost that may be deducted from the employee's paycheck.

#### Employer-provided health insurance requirements

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act sets minimum standards for health insurance companies regarding services and coverage. Most employers with 50 or more employees are required to offer health care plans or pay a penalty. Employees who aren't covered by their employer or who elect to seek coverage outside their employer plans can find available plans during the open enrollment period at [Healthcare.gov](https://www.healthcare.gov).

#### Health insurance coverage

Most plans provide coverage for visits to primary care physicians and specialists, hospitalization, and emergency care, and most will require a co-payment. Complementary or integrative health care, wellness, prescription, vision, and dental care coverage will vary by the plan and employer.

#### Dental care plan coverage

Companies with dental care benefits offer insurance that helps pay a portion of the cost of dental treatment and care. Depending on the company's policy for dental care benefits, dental coverage includes a range of treatments and procedures.

#### Paid holidays

The law does not require employers to provide their employees with paid holidays. However, many employers make sure that their employees get time off for holidays (paid and unpaid) or provide overtime pay for those willing to work on a holiday.

#### Pay raises

Some employers increase wages for everyone by a certain amount each year to keep up with inflation. There are also different types of incentive pay that increase wages based on merit or meeting certain objectives. A common type of incentive pay is commission. Inside sales or customer service employers frequently try to motivate employees to upsell customers for a commission.

#### Severance pay

Employers are not required to provide severance to employees that they lay off due to downsizing or redundancies. However, many employers want to help these employees and maintain a positive reputation. They may choose to offer severance pay, usually based on length of employment, plus additional benefits such as resume reviews or other outplacement services as a benefit to laid-off employees.

#### Flexible schedules and working remotely

To attract top talent, some employers offer flexible work schedules that allow employees to set their own working hours. Remote work is a benefit that many workers find desirable and companies are instituting hybrid schedules to allow employees to work from home on some days during the week.

#### Hazard pay

Jobs in security, construction, military, and other dangerous professions usually provide hazard pay to any employees that must work in unsafe conditions. These may include extreme weather, dangerous equipment, violent environments, or working at extreme heights, for example.

#### College debt repayment assistance

With the growing student debt crisis, some employers are offering debt repayment assistance. With the SECURE 2.0 Act, more employers may offer this perk, especially to attract new graduates who may be struggling to make ends meet as they begin their professional careers.

#### Fringe Benefits and Perks

Other benefits can vary between industries and businesses and are sometimes referred to as "fringe" benefits, especially in the academic and nonprofit sectors. These perks, also known as "benefits in kind," can include:

- Bonuses; profit sharing
- Medical, disability, and life insurance
- Paid vacations
- Free meals
- Use of a company car
- Pensions and stock options

- Child care
- Gratuity
- Company holidays, personal days, sick leave, and other time off from work
- Retirement and pension plan contributions
- Tuition assistance or reimbursement for employees and/or their families
- Discounts on company products and services; housing

Fringe benefits are not required by law and vary from employer to employer.

It's a good idea to thoroughly review the benefits offered through an employer and make sure that your overall compensation plan is right for you and your family. Ask specific questions based on your needs and on the criteria that are important to you.