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Retirement Accounts Cheat Sheet

401(k), IRA, Roth, HSA — 2026 limits, tax treatment, and withdrawal rules on one page.

	401(k) · 403(b) · 457	Traditional IRA	Roth IRA	HSA
2026 limit	$24,500	$7,500 (shared across all your IRAs)	$7,500 (shared across all your IRAs)	$4,400 self-only $8,750 family
Catch-up	+$8,000 age 50+ +$11,250 ages 60–63	+$1,100 age 50+	+$1,100 age 50+	+$1,000 age 55+
Money going in	Pre-tax from paycheck (Roth 401(k) option: after-tax)	Deductible if you qualify by income*	After-tax — no deduction	Pre-tax / deductible. Requires a high-deductible health plan
While it grows	Tax-deferred	Tax-deferred	Tax-free	Tax-free
Taking it out	Taxed as income; 10% penalty before 59½ (some exceptions)	Taxed as income; 10% penalty before 59½	Contributions anytime, tax-free. Earnings tax-free after 59½ + 5-year rule	Tax-free for medical costs at any age. After 65, non-medical works like a traditional IRA
Income limits	None	Deduction phases out $81k–$91k single / $129k–$149k married*	Eligibility phases out $153k–$168k single / $242k–$252k married	None — just need HDHP coverage
Superpower	Employer match — free money. Always take all of it	Lowers this year's tax bill	Tax-free forever; no required withdrawals in your lifetime	Triple tax advantage — the only account with all three

* Traditional IRA deduction phase-outs apply when you (or a spouse) are covered by a workplace plan. All figures are official IRS limits for tax year 2026 (irs.gov). Limits adjust most years — this sheet is dated for a reason.

A SENSIBLE ORDER OF OPERATIONS

1 401(k) to the full employer match

Never leave match money on the table — it's an instant 50–100% return.

2 Max the HSA (if eligible)

Triple tax advantage beats everything else per dollar.

3 Fill a Roth or Traditional IRA

More investment choices and often lower fees than workplace plans.

4 Back to the 401(k)

Raise contributions toward the full $24,500.

Roth vs. Traditional in one line: pay tax now (Roth) if you expect a higher tax rate later; pay tax later (Traditional) if you expect a lower one. Early career usually favors Roth; peak earnings usually favor Traditional. Unsure? Splitting between both is a perfectly good answer.