

A gold IRA can feel like a quiet, steady place to hold assets that are not tied to a single company, sector, or central plan. Then the calendar catches up. At some point, the IRS requires you to start taking required minimum distributions, commonly called RMDs. If you do not, the penalty is not small.

I have seen people treat a precious metals IRA like a vault they can ignore. The mistake is assuming “gold is different.” The RMD rules attach to the retirement account wrapper, not to the metal inside. So the question becomes practical: how do RMDs work when your IRA holds bullion, coins, or allocated metal, and how do you avoid turning a tax obligation into an operational mess?

This is a real-world guide to RMDs for gold IRAs and other precious metals IRA setups, with the details that matter when you are planning distributions, coordinating with a custodian, and dealing with timing.

## **The basic rule: RMDs are about the retirement account, not the investment**

If your gold IRA is a traditional IRA, SEP IRA, or SIMPLE IRA, RMDs apply. The IRS requires a minimum distribution each year once you reach the required beginning date (RBD). Your account’s investments can be stocks, bonds, cash, or physical gold. The RMD math is based on the IRA owner’s age and the prior year-end account balance, not on the market price of gold on the day you sell.

That is the first mental shift. When your IRA holds marketable securities, it is easy to distribute shares or sell enough to fund a check. With a gold IRA, the process often includes selling metal, converting it to cash inside the IRA, and then distributing cash to you. The cash conversion step is where delays happen and where you can end up missing deadlines if you wait too long.

If you have a Roth gold IRA, RMD rules differ. In general, Roth IRAs do not require RMDs for the original owner during lifetime. But Roth conversions, rollovers, and certain inherited situations can complicate things, so it is worth verifying your situation with the account custodian and your tax professional.

## **When do RMDs start? Age triggers have shifted**

The age thresholds have changed in recent years due to federal law, and that means two people with the same IRA balance can face different start dates. Broadly, the required beginning age follows the SECURE Act changes:

- For many IRA owners, the RMD age is 73
- For people born in 1960 or later, the RMD age is 75
- The IRS sets the required beginning date as a deadline tied to the year you reach the relevant age

Here is the operational takeaway I suggest people plan around: if you are nearing the RMD age, do not wait until “next year” to figure out how your gold IRA custodian handles liquidation, pricing, and distribution processing. Many custodians can move fast, but precious metals require inventory and valuation steps.

Also note the timing nuance. The IRS generally treats the first RMD as due by April 1 of the year following the year you reach the relevant age, while later RMDs are due by December 31 each year. That creates two deadlines that feel harmless until the first time you encounter them while coordinating metal sales.

If you are the type of person who likes to set an internal calendar early, a smart approach is to treat your RMD year like a tax project, not a casual year-end task.

# How the RMD amount is calculated for a gold IRA

The RMD amount is calculated using your IRA's prior year-end balance and an IRS life expectancy factor. Your custodian typically calculates your RMD automatically based on IRS tables and sends you the number to distribute. That matters because a gold IRA can include physical holdings and may have specific valuation timing conventions, so trusting the custodian's calculation is usually safer than trying to DIY the arithmetic.

Still, you should understand the moving parts:

1. The starting point is generally your IRA value as of December 31 of the prior year.
2. Your life expectancy factor comes from the IRS tables applicable to your age and account type.
3. The RMD is the prior year-end balance divided by that factor.
4. You can take more than the RMD without violating the minimum requirement, but the extra is still taxable if your IRA is traditional.

For a gold IRA, the custodian's valuation method [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/three-achievable-steps-to-increase-your-savings-this\\_b\\_58ae01f9e4b0ea6ee3d03506](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/three-achievable-steps-to-increase-your-savings-this_b_58ae01f9e4b0ea6ee3d03506) at year-end becomes a practical lever. Gold prices move. Custodians typically report an account value using a standardized valuation approach for the date. If you hold both allocated and segregated metal, or if you have a mix of coins and bullion, the account valuation can involve set pricing conventions.

I have watched clients focus on the day their custodian sells metal and forget that RMD math started at last December 31. A small sale timing difference near distribution day does not change the RMD formula, but it can change how much metal the custodian needs to sell to generate the cash.

## How RMDs work when your IRA holds physical gold

Most gold IRAs are custodian-managed. That means you do not directly walk into a dealer and pull out bars. Instead, the custodian manages the holding and, when needed, liquidates holdings to create cash inside the IRA for distribution.

When an RMD is due, a typical flow looks like this:

- Your custodian determines the RMD amount.
- The custodian reviews whether sufficient cash is already in the IRA.
- If not enough cash exists, the custodian sells enough precious metals to cover the distribution.
- The custodian then processes the distribution to you, usually as a check or ACH.

The main friction points are timing and market pricing. Precise metal pricing is not always instantaneous. Even if gold spot is moving rapidly, custodian pricing can incorporate bid/ask spreads, dealer markups, assay or premium differences, and internal liquidation schedules.

If you wait until late in the year, you can run into a situation where the custodian cannot complete the sale and distribution by December 31. That does not just risk penalties, it can also force an inefficient workaround, like withdrawing more than intended due to operational constraints or delaying the distribution and dealing with penalties.

In my experience, the most common mistake is underestimating the "back-office" time. People focus on whether they are comfortable selling gold, but the timeline is really about custody, internal settlement, and distribution processing.

# The penalty for missing RMDs is not something to gamble with

If you fail to take the full required minimum distribution by the applicable deadline, the IRS penalty can be severe. The exact penalty rate depends on statutory rules, but it is designed to discourage inaction.

I do not recommend trying to “fix it later” without understanding the penalty and whether any relief mechanisms apply. Some taxpayers can request waivers based on reasonable error and corrective steps, but that is not a casual process.

If you are planning for a gold IRA RMD, treat deadlines as hard. Assume you need lead time for liquidating metal and processing the distribution.

## What taxes look like for traditional gold IRAs

For traditional IRAs, RMD withdrawals are generally taxable as ordinary income, unless some portion of your distribution is non-deductible basis (for example, after nondeductible contributions that were later converted or tracked). If your gold IRA has had contributions that were not fully deductible, you may have a mix, but you have to confirm that with your tax records and the custodian’s reporting.

For a rollover to a traditional IRA that includes pre-tax and after-tax amounts, the tax treatment can get more intricate. The custodian can often provide Form 1099-R reporting, but your tax professional still needs to interpret it correctly.

A practical planning point: if you take your RMD all at once near the deadline, you may cluster taxable income into a single year and push yourself into a higher marginal bracket than you expected. Spreading distributions earlier in the year can sometimes reduce that effect, but it depends on your income, deductions, and state taxes.

Gold IRA owners often have uneven income patterns, especially retirees who begin pensions, Social Security, or part-time work. If that describes you, coordinating the RMD amount with your broader tax picture can be just as important as the mechanics of selling metal.

## Keeping it flexible: can you take more than the RMD?

Yes. You can withdraw more than the required minimum distribution. The IRS minimum rule is just that, a minimum. Many people withdraw a bit more to cover living expenses, to simplify their planning, or to fund Roth conversions.

Just remember two things.

First, extra withdrawals from a traditional IRA increase taxable income. Second, taking more does not reduce your obligation next year in a way that offsets everything automatically, because the RMD calculation each year depends on that year’s life expectancy factor and your prior year-end balance.

When a gold IRA is involved, withdrawing more can also mean selling more metal earlier, which may lock in transaction costs or liquidation prices you might prefer to manage.

## Coordinating your RMD across multiple accounts

Another common wrinkle is that you might have more than one IRA type. The IRS allows certain flexibility in aggregating RMDs from multiple traditional IRAs, as long as the total distributed amount meets the combined requirement. However, Roth IRAs and traditional IRAs have separate rules, and inherited accounts follow separate schedules.

For gold IRAs, aggregation can be helpful if you have one account that holds physical metal and another that holds cash or liquid securities. You might be able to fund part of your total RMD from a more liquid IRA while leaving some of the gold for later sale.

Still, confirm the operational reality with your custodian. Even if IRS rules allow a distribution to be taken across accounts, custodians manage distributions using their own accounting systems and may require specific election instructions.

If you do not want surprises, ask your custodian a direct question early: "Do you send an RMD based on my account only, and does your process allow coordinating with another IRA to satisfy the combined total?" Custodians are used to these conversations, and getting the answer in writing can save headaches.

## **What if you have a small amount of cash inside the gold IRA?**

Many gold IRAs are set up so that the metal itself is the primary asset, with limited cash held in the account. If there is minimal cash, your custodian must sell enough gold to generate the distribution.

This can create a practical issue: you may not be able to sell an exact fraction that equals the RMD dollar amount due to how the custodian handles inventory, fractional bar policies, or coin unit sizing. As a result, the liquidation proceeds may exceed the exact RMD, leading to a slightly higher distribution.

From a tax perspective, that extra amount is still taxable if the IRA is traditional. From a "I wanted the minimum" perspective, it can feel annoying. But as long as you understand it and you are comfortable with the tax impact, it is usually manageable.

If you want precise control, some people plan for an interim cash buffer in their IRA, or they maintain enough cash to reduce the need for last-minute liquidation. Whether that fits your strategy depends on your account custodian's rules and your overall allocation plan.

## **A few scenarios that often trip people up**

Gold IRAs are not unusual, but how you got the account can change how the RMD story unfolds. Here are situations I see frequently.

### **Inherited gold IRAs**

Inherited IRAs have their own RMD requirements depending on who the beneficiary is, when the original owner died, and whether the inheritance qualifies for certain categories. Sometimes beneficiaries must withdraw over a period, sometimes they must distribute by a specific end date, and in some cases the "stretch" options changed under federal law.

If you inherited a precious metals IRA, do not assume the original owner's age rules carry over. Verify your inherited-account classification with the custodian and your tax professional. With physical assets, there can also be operational timing constraints about liquidation and distribution.

### **Rollovers and recent conversions**

If you rolled assets into a traditional gold IRA recently, the RMD calculation and tax treatment depends on the account type, timing, and basis tracking. Conversions between Roth and traditional accounts can also change what withdrawals are taxable.

A conversion followed by later withdrawals can produce outcomes that differ from what you expected if you assume RMDs are “just the same as taking money out.” Again, confirm with your tax advisor, especially if you are near the RMD age.

## **Turning age 73 or 75 mid-year**

The first RMD timing is tied to when you reach the threshold age, not just a generic calendar date. If you turn the relevant age late in the year, it still affects whether your first RMD must be taken by the next April 1 or whether you have more time depending on the IRS required beginning date rules.

This is exactly the kind of detail that makes it worth planning with the custodian early. A small misinterpretation can cost you months, and months are what you do not have when metal has to be sold and a distribution has to clear.

## **Practical steps to stay ahead of your RMD in a gold IRA**

If you only remember one thing, make it this: start the operational planning early, and let your custodian do the IRS-facing math. The rest is logistics and tax coordination.

Here is a concise checklist that works well for many gold IRA owners:

- Confirm your RMD start year and deadline with your tax professional, based on your birth year and account type
- Ask your custodian how they liquidate precious metals to fund the RMD, including typical processing timelines
- Make sure your custodian calculates the RMD using the correct prior year-end value and the applicable IRS life expectancy factor
- Decide whether you will take only the minimum or more for tax planning, and plan withholding if required
- Coordinate multiple IRA distributions so you meet total obligations without creating unnecessary tax spikes

If you do these steps with enough lead time, the RMD process tends to feel more like an annual administrative event than an emergency.

## **How to discuss RMDs with your custodian (questions that save time)**

Custodians handle RMDs regularly, but the details vary by platform. The goal is to understand three operational points: valuation, liquidation mechanics, and distribution processing.

You might ask questions like:

- How do you value precious metals in the account for year-end reporting and for RMD calculation purposes?
- What is your internal timeline from “RMD requested” to “distribution processed,” especially when you need to sell metal?
- Do you need to sell specific coins first, or can you sell bullion, and are there any limitations?
- What happens if the RMD deadline is approaching and gold prices shift? (You want to know how spreads and pricing are handled.)

These questions help you avoid misunderstandings. For example, one custodian may require advance instruction months ahead for physical liquidation, while another can execute quickly for liquid allocations. Knowing your custodian’s normal timeline prevents you from trying to solve a scheduling problem on December 30.

# Can you use in-kind distributions for a gold IRA?

People often ask whether they can distribute the gold itself rather than selling it. In many retirement account contexts, in-kind distributions of certain assets are limited or may trigger rules you did not expect. For physical precious metals held in a retirement wrapper, in-kind distribution may not be the default, and it can be restricted by custodian policy.

Even if in-kind distribution is possible, it is not automatically tax-free or penalty-free. A distribution of assets from a traditional IRA generally becomes taxable, and the IRS still treats it as an IRA distribution. Also, once the distribution is in-kind, you are responsible for handling the asset outside the retirement wrapper, which can create recordkeeping and compliance issues.

I recommend treating in-kind gold distribution as a “confirm before you plan” idea. Ask your custodian directly what is allowed for your specific gold IRA structure and how it is reported on the relevant tax forms. Do not assume it is allowed just because the IRA holds physical metal.

## Special attention for gold IRA liquidity and pricing spreads

Gold can be liquid in the everyday market, but an IRA is not a day-trading account. The conversion from precious metal holdings to cash often involves spreads and liquidation premiums or discounts.

If you have a large RMD relative to your account’s liquid cash, the amount of metal the custodian needs to sell can be significant. That can affect how much of your allocation you are forced to unwind sooner than you would prefer.

This is where portfolio planning meets RMD planning. If your retirement plan assumes you will maintain a target percentage in gold, consider whether the annual RMD will gradually drain the cash component and force periodic sales of metal.

For some people, that is fine. For others, it changes the character of the portfolio. The solution might be to hold a cash buffer in the IRA, maintain a portion in more liquid instruments within the precious metals IRA where allowed, or plan additional taxable income strategies in earlier years so you are not forced into larger gold sales at the exact moment you need cash.

## What records you should keep

RMDs for gold IRAs create documentation that will matter during tax season, especially if you have mixed contribution types or multiple account transactions.

At minimum, keep:

- Custodian statements showing prior year-end account value used for the RMD calculation
- Any distribution confirmations showing the amount and date processed
- Form 1099-R from the custodian for the relevant tax year
- Your IRA contribution and conversion records, if you have nondeductible basis or conversions

Good records do not just help you file correctly. They also make it easier to respond if the IRS questions a missed or partial distribution and you need to demonstrate that you followed the rules.

## **The bottom line: plan early, rely on your custodian, and treat RMDs as a cash management issue**

RMDs for gold IRAs are not mysterious, but they are operational. The IRS rules attach to the account type, your age, and the prior year-end balance. The “gold part” of the equation shows up when you need to generate cash from physical holdings and meet firm deadlines.

If you plan early, coordinate with your custodian on liquidation timelines, and align the withdrawal with your broader tax picture, the process becomes manageable. If you wait, you can end up with rushed sales, awkward distribution timing, and the kind of penalty exposure that is not worth testing.

If you want, tell me your situation at a high level, your account type (traditional vs Roth), and whether it is an inherited gold IRA. I can outline the most likely RMD timing and the practical steps to discuss with your precious metals IRA custodian.