



## PRACTICAL MONEY GUIDES

# Identity Theft



How to safeguard your identity and financial information from theft.

### What to Do If Your Identity Is Stolen

When your personal and financial information falls into the wrong hands, the consequences can be devastating. Identity thieves can steal money from your accounts, open new credit cards and apply for loans. This can have lasting effects on your credit score, so it's important to take steps to protect your identity.

#### Credit Bureaus

Contact the fraud departments of each of the credit bureaus listed on the back of this guide immediately if you are a victim of identity theft. Request a fraud alert on your file; doing so will not damage your credit score. You can also request a security freeze, preventing credit issuers from obtaining access to your credit files without your permission, hence keeping thieves from opening up new credit cards or loans.

#### Law Enforcement

Report identity theft to your local police department. If the crime occurred in an area other than where you live, you may wish to report it to law enforcement there as well. The police will create an identity theft report and give you a copy that you can send to the three credit bureaus.

#### Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

The FTC does not investigate identity theft cases, but can share your information with investigators.

#### Banks and Credit Card Issuers

Report the theft to your credit card issuers and banks and request replacement cards with new account numbers. If some of your checks were stolen, you can ask your bank to stop payment on them.

### Five Ways to Protect Yourself

There are some simple steps you can take to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of identity theft or card fraud.

#### 1. Practice Safe Internet Use

Delete spam emails that ask for personal information, and keep your anti-virus and anti-spyware software up-to-date. Shop online only with secure web pages (check the address bar for "https" next to an image of a lock). Never email credit card numbers, Social Security numbers or other personal information.

#### 2. Destroy Personal Financial Records

Shred unneeded credit card statements, ATM and debit card receipts and other documents that contain personal financial information.

#### 3. Guard Your Social Security Number

Thieves seek your Social Security number because it can help them access your credit and open bogus accounts. Never carry your card; instead, memorize your number and store the card securely.

#### 4. Check Your Credit Report

Regularly review your credit reports for suspicious activity. You can request one free copy of each report per year at [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com) or contact the three credit bureaus directly.

#### 5. Beware of Scams

Never give out personal information via phone or email to someone claiming to represent your bank, credit card company, a government agency, a charity or other organization. If you think the request is legitimate, contact the company directly to confirm their claims.



Children are at high risk for identity theft and fraud. Identity thieves can use their Social Security numbers to illegally obtain jobs, credit accounts, mortgages and car loans. Use the same precautions handling your child's personal information as with your own and follow the same theft report procedures.

## Tips For Travelers

Whether you're traveling for business or pleasure, be on the alert for opportunities that thieves may try to take advantage of:

**Receipts.** Don't leave credit card receipts on restaurant tables; sign and hand them directly to the server. Keep your copy of all receipts.

**Wallets.** Instead of carrying your wallet in your pocket or bag, consider using a travel pouch worn under your clothing to keep it out of sight.

**Checks.** Leave your checkbook at home, safely stored in a locked safe or drawer.

**Phones.** Always protect your smartphone with complex passwords or passcodes. Turn off Bluetooth as a security measure, and be aware that many free Wi-Fi networks are not secure.

**Mail.** Put a delivery hold on your mail whenever you travel. It can be delivered the day after you return from your trip.

**Hotels.** Lock up all valuables in rooms or hotel safes while you are out, including laptops, passports and other documents containing personal identifying information.

**Airplanes.** Don't put any items that contain your Social Security number, card or account numbers in checked luggage. Always carry those items securely in carry-on luggage.



Send police reports to the credit bureaus by certified mail, return receipt requested.

## Identity Theft Resources

If you are a victim of identity theft, your first action should be to contact the fraud departments of the three main credit bureaus listed below. Request that a fraud alert be placed in your file.

### Federal Trade Commission's Identity Theft Hotline

1.877.IDTHEFT (1-877-438-4338)

### Credit Bureaus

#### Equifax

Report Order: 1-800-685-1111 / Fraud Hotline: 1-888-766-0008  
[equifax.com](https://www.equifax.com)

#### Experian

Report Order: 1-888-397-3742 / Fraud Hotline: 1-888-397-3742  
[experian.com](https://www.experian.com)

#### TransUnion

Report Order: 1-877-322-8228 / Fraud Hotline: 1-800-680-7289  
[tuc.com](https://www.tuc.com)

This guide is one of a series on *Practical Money Skills*.

- Budgeting Basics
- Credit History
- Credit Card Basics
- Debit Card Basics
- Identity Theft
- Prepaid Card Basics

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