



# How to Avoid Identity Theft

Identity theft occurs when a person commits fraud while posing as someone else. The threat of identity theft is real and can take months or even years to recover from. Use the information below to familiarize yourself with the precautions you can take to minimize the chance of becoming a victim and, if you are a victim, help you recover from the situation.

## Follow These Helpful Hints to Avoid Becoming a Victim of Identity Theft:

### Personal:

1. Order a copy of your credit report on a frequent basis (at least annually, preferably quarterly). You can request your credit report at [AnnualCreditReport.com](http://AnnualCreditReport.com).
2. If you have to give private information over the phone, ensure you are in a secure location.
3. Shred all financial statements, billing statements, and pre-approved credit card offers.
4. The IRS does not request personal/financial data through email, so don't respond to any emails asking for that information.
5. Check your financial accounts regularly.
6. Select Personal Identification Numbers (PINs) and passwords carefully so they can't be easily guessed by someone else.
7. Don't give out private information over the phone or internet unless you have initiated the contact or know for certain to whom you are speaking.
8. Destroy or complete a secure wipe of your computer's hard drive if you are selling it, giving it away, or disposing of it.
9. Don't carry your Social Security card with you.
10. Don't carry your registration in your vehicle; instead carry it in your wallet.
11. Make photo copies of all of the cards in your wallet and keep them in a safe place.

### E-Commerce:

1. Ensure you are using an ATM without someone watching you.
2. Pay your bills online using a secure website.
3. Avoid entering your credit card number online unless it is encrypted on a secure website.

### Mail:

1. Take outgoing personal and/or bill payments to U.S. Postal Service mailboxes or drop them off inside a post office.
2. Have the post office hold your mail when you are out of town.
3. Don't leave mail sitting in an unprotected mailbox.

### Banking:

1. Review monthly bank and credit card statements for mistakes or unfamiliar charges.
2. Have your paychecks directly deposited into your bank account.
3. Avoid providing personal information over the phone or via the internet.

## If You Are - or Become - a Victim of Identity Theft, Follow These Steps to Protect Yourself:

1. Contact the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) at [FTC.gov](http://FTC.gov) or 877.438.4338.
2. Contact the fraud departments of any one of the major credit reporting agencies:
  - Equifax ..... 800.525.6285
  - Experian ..... 888.397.3742
  - TransUnion ..... 800.680.7289
3. Close the accounts that have been used fraudulently.
4. File a police report.
5. Keep an identity theft log for your personal records.
6. Contact other agencies that might be involved: Social Security Administration's Fraud Hotline (800.269.0271), U.S. Postal Inspection Service (888.877.7644), and the Internal Revenue Service (800.829.0433).