

Let's Talk Finances

Do You Suspect Identity Theft? What to Do Next.



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Has someone used your personal information to obtain a new credit card or open a new mobile or online account? Maybe you've noticed some charges on your existing credit card or online purchases you don't remember making. Or perhaps you've even discovered that someone has applied for unemployment or filed a tax return using your name and Social Security number. If so, you may be a victim of identity theft.

What Do Identity Thieves Do with Your Information?

Once identity thieves have your personal information, they can drain your bank accounts, run up charges on your credit cards, open new accounts for financial services or utilities, or get medical treatment on your health insurance. They can also file a tax return in your name and get your refund. In extreme cases, a thief may even use your name with the police during an arrest.

Clues That Someone Has Stolen Your Information

- Unexplained withdrawals from your bank account.
- Missing bills or other mail.
- Merchants refuse to accept your checks.
- Collection agencies call you about debts that aren't yours.
- Unfamiliar charges or accounts on your credit report.
- Medical bills for services you didn't receive.
- Your health insurance plan rejects legitimate medical claims because you have reached your benefits limit.
- A health plan refuses to cover you because medical records show a condition you don't have.
- The IRS notifies you that more than one tax return was filed in your name, or that you have income from an employer you don't work for.
- You are notified of a data breach at a company with whom you do business.

If your wallet, Social Security number, or other personal information is lost or stolen, there are steps you need to take to help protect yourself.

What to Do Right Away

- Call the companies where you know fraud occurred and ask them to close or freeze your accounts. Change your login information and PINs for online access.
- Contact one of the three credit bureaus (Experian, TransUnion, or Equifax) to place a fraud alert and request your credit report. The company you contact will notify the other two.
- Report identity theft to the FTC at IdentityTheft.gov.
- You may choose to file a report with your local police department.

Once you have completed these first steps, you can take a deep breath and begin to repair any damage that has been done.

What to Do Next

- Close new accounts that were opened fraudulently in your name.
- Remove fraudulent charges from your accounts.
- Correct the information on your credit report, and consider adding an extended fraud alert or credit freeze.
- Review your credit reports regularly. Through April 2021, you can check your reports free on a weekly basis through [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com).

Recovering from identity theft can be a tedious process, but the sooner you tackle it, the less damage will be done. Additional information can be found at [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov) and [ftc.gov/idtheft](https://www.ftc.gov/idtheft).