

## Financial Wisdom Podcast – Prevent Credit Identity Theft

Welcome to the Financial Wisdom podcast series – Take Control of your Financial Future.

In this session, we are going to review some steps to help keep you from becoming a victim of credit identity theft.

Identity theft has become one of the fastest growing crimes in America. It is happening to celebrities as well as ordinary citizens.

Credit identity theft can be described as the unauthorized use of your identifying information to open new financial accounts, or to use of your existing accounts to steal your money or charge items, leaving you with the bills. Even though there are laws that may provide some help if you are a victim, you should take care to avoid becoming a victim.

Identity thieves are most interested in the personal information that would enable them pass themselves off as you. This includes your Social Security number, date of birth, mother's maiden name, and your existing account numbers at financial institutions.

Identity thieves will try to get this information in many ways, such as:

- Stealing your wallet or purse with everything in it.
- Taking mail from your mailbox, especially bank statements and credit card statements.

- Diverting your mail by using a change of address form at the Post Office.
- Searching through your trash for copies of statements that you've thrown out.
- And, posing as a representative of your financial institution on the phone and asking about your account.

To keep your information private, here are some of the steps to consider:

1. Carry as few credit cards as possible and periodically check to make sure you still have them.
2. Avoid carrying your Social Security card and passport unless it is absolutely needed.
3. Never have your Social Security number printed on your checks.
4. Shred all important papers that contain financial information before disposing of them.
5. Dispose of credit card and ATM receipts properly.
6. Sign new credit cards when you receive them.
7. Guard your PIN, or personal identification number, carefully.
8. Make your PIN and passwords hard for someone else to guess. Don't use your birth date, phone number or last four digits of your Social Security number.
9. Keep a list of credit card and financial account numbers with phone numbers in a safe place.
10. Guard against mail theft by mailing payment envelopes from a collection box instead of just raising the flag on your home mailbox.
11. Never give personal information over the phone unless you made the call or you know whom you are speaking with.

12. Review your financial and credit card statements very carefully for unknown transactions. If you see something unusual, call the institution immediately.
13. Periodically, order and review your credit report. You can go online at: [annualcreditreport.com](https://annualcreditreport.com) or you can call the three credit agencies. If you see something that looks odd, follow up right away.

While there are no guarantees that these steps will prevent thieves from targeting you, the harder you make it for them to steal your identity, the less likely you are to become a credit identity theft victim.

Join us again for another Financial Wisdom podcast. And as always, thanks for listening.