

# 10 Tips To Reduce Your Exposure And Prevent Identity Theft

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Identity theft is the country's fastest-growing financial crime. The Federal Trade Commission estimates that 27.3 million Americans have been victims of identity theft in the past 5 years, including 9.9 million people last year alone. Some ways to prevent becoming a victim could include avoid using credit cards or debit cards, stop filling out more credit applications, and cancel all of your credit cards. But the fact is that most exposure to identity theft is beyond your control, because there is still enough information about you and your finances floating around out there for identity thieves to put their hands on. Here are some tips to reduce your exposure and prevent identity theft:

## 1 - Make It As Difficult As Possible For The Thief.

Most Identity thieves aren't dedicated, but opportunistic creatures. If they come across any difficulty in getting your information, they will move on to the next potential victim. Keep your documents under lock and key. Don't make it easy for a repairman or a guest in your house to walk off with your checkbook or some of your important files. Don't fool yourself, you don't have to be rich or have a high credit score to have your identity stolen. Some identity thieves say that middle-class folks make the best targets, because they pay less attention to their finances than wealthy individuals.

## 2- Monitor Your Credit Report Constantly.

The first hint that you might have become a victim is a suspicious entry on your credit report. Experts recommend that you review your credit report twice a year or more.

## 3 - Buy a Paper Shredder.

Papers and documents that include personal financial information or your social security number must be shredded before is sent to the trash.

## 4 - Ask About Business Shredding Policies.

When required to give personal financial information, ask if the business has a shredding policy in place. Financial institutions, tax preparers, and companies with medical information should all be able to shred copies of your documents or have you come and pick them up, so you can do it yourself.

## 5 - Don't Give Out Your Social Security Number.

Only Employers, IRS, DMV, Social Security Administration and certain Financial Institutions and Insurers that use your SSN to run credit checks to determine your premiums should be allowed to have this nine-digit number. When asked for your SSN as proof that you are who you say you are, give them only the last four digits.

## 6 - Protect Your Incoming and Outgoing Mail.

Get a Locking Mailbox. Many identity thieves simply follow the mail man around and grab what they can from unprotected mailboxes. Consider using the nearest post office to send all your mail, rather than leaving it out where anyone can take it. Or sign up for a secure online bill-paying service.

## 7 - Always Keep an Eye on Your Debit Card.

Just like a credit card, your ATM card can be used without punching in a personal identification number. The banks won't hold you responsible for fraud using VISA or MasterCard logo cards but a thief can quickly empty your bank account and could be days until the bank can restore the stolen cash. Use a credit card when paying a restaurant bill or anywhere you won't be able to monitor the actual transaction.

## 8 - Be Wary of Phone Solicitors and E-mails.

Don't give out sensitive information by phone or email to requests purporting to be from financial institutions, unless you initiated contact or really trust the institution. Criminals are using a technique called "phishing," which uses an email claiming to be from your Bank and that redirects you to a look-alike website where you are asked to input your account numbers. When contacted this way, do not reply to the email and only call the Bank's 1-800 number from your statement for communication.

## 9 - Monitor Your Social Security Statements.

Make sure you are being credited for all the taxes you have paid into the system. Missing earnings or earnings that are not yours can be an indication of fraud. Call the SSA at 1-800-772-1213 if there are any discrepancies.

## 10 - Carry Only the Necessary in Your Wallet.

Do not carry your Social Security Number in your wallet and only a few credit and debit cards should be in it. In case you have your wallet stolen, grab your cell or the nearest phone immediately and call to cancel your most important credit cards such as 1-800-VISA911 and 1-800-MASTERCARD. Also, make a photocopy of all your cards and your driver's license. This will make it easier to report the thefts and get them replaced.

**About The Author**

G. L. Bycz is the founder and developer of <http://www consolidate-credit-card.net> an online source for free tips and information on credit card debt consolidation, refinancing loans, debt management programs and financial planning.