

# Identity Theft and Some Basic Precautions

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Identity theft is a growing problem and criminals devise new and more ingenious methods for procuring our private information each and every day. We are not defenseless against identity thieves and a few basic precautions will lower our chances of becoming a victim.

My first recommendation is to invest in a personal shredding machine which can be purchased inexpensively at your local office supply outlet or online. The preferred type of shredder is the cross cut variety which reduces documents to tiny confetti size remnants rather than just the style that shreds in strips which can be easily reassembled to reveal sensitive data.

You should shred any credit card statements after payment unless you retain for tax reasons and then these should be kept in a locked file or safe. Also completely shred unwanted credit card applications and ideally you should opt out of receiving this type of offer. Opting out is as easy as calling 888-567-8688 toll free thus removing you from the 3 major credit bureau lists. You do need to contact your own bank and existing credit card companies directly to veto these mailings.

Shred your bank statements after balancing against your checks again unless you retain these for tax and/or business purposes. Your employee pay stubs also contain private information and should be shredded. Older 401K statements should be shredded as you only need to retain the 3 most recent years in addition to the original statement when you opened your plan.

I would recommend that everyone order and thoroughly review their credit report each and every year. The three major credit bureaus are required to provide one free copy to all consumers annually. This procedure alone will not stop identity theft but a thorough review will alert you to any irregularities on your report and allow you to take action. You may find that you have credit accounts which you don't use and these should be closed to minimize your exposure.

Another wise precaution is to limit the amount of personal information you carry in your wallet or purse on a daily basis. Unless you really need them don't carry more than one credit card on your person. Plan ahead if you are shopping and require a specific store card on that particular day. We rarely need to carry our SSN unless applying for a job so just memorize your number and keep your card in a secure location. Don't carry personal checks in bulk, so if you keep one or two in your wallet just replace them as they are used. It seems unfair that we need to alter our way of operating on a daily basis but just taking a few common sense precautions can really reduce our chances of being a target.

Jim Hutton researches and writes on the subject of identity theft and you can view the entire Identity Theft Article Library at: [Identity Theft Prevention](#)