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Prepare for Life's Surprises with an Emergency Fund

We've all been there: a problem suddenly pops up that requires some quick cash to solve. Whether it's a leaky roof, a broken appliance, car repairs, or a change in job status, life is full of surprises. Still, [4 in 10 adults](#) say they would borrow, sell something, or not be able to pay if faced with a \$400 emergency expense.

Having an emergency fund—a nest egg of money set aside to cover unexpected expenses—can help you breathe easier during stressful times. Here, we'll share some simple tips on how to start (and grow!) your emergency fund.

➔ How much do you need?

You may be wondering how much money you should have in your emergency fund. A good rule of thumb is to set aside enough cash to cover three to six months of essential living expenses (e.g., housing, car payments, child care, and household bills). This may seem like a lot of money, but saving is easier when you put away a little at a time. Think about it this way: if you direct deposit just \$25 per week into your account for one year, you'd save \$1,300. And if you can bump that weekly deposit to \$40? Your emergency fund would have a healthy balance of \$2,080 after just one year!

To accelerate the process and keep your account growing, you might also try out one of these saving strategies:

- Designate larger chunks of cash from your tax refund or a company bonus to put in your emergency fund.
- Skip your daily coffee indulgence for a month or two and direct those dollars to your emergency fund.
- Organize a [garage or yard sale](#), and contribute the profits to your emergency fund. You'll reap the rewards and declutter your home at the same time!

➔ What type of account works best?

Choosing the right type of account for your emergency fund is also important. You want to have easy access to the funds, but stuffing cash under the mattress or into a jar could tempt you to make the occasional withdrawal for nonemergencies. To fight the urge to impulse spend, open a low-fee bank account. An even better option is to find a bank that incentivizes you to open a new account with a cash bonus. Just be sure to keep the ATM card at home instead of in your wallet or forgo getting one altogether. Last but not least, a money market account may offer a higher interest rate than a regular savings account, helping you grow your balance over time.

If you do have to dip into your emergency fund to cover an expense, always replenish it as quickly as possible. You never know when lightning will strike. But when it does, you'll be prepared!



Your Year-End Retirement Plan Maintenance Checklist

As 2018 winds down, your list of tasks to complete before year-end is probably getting longer. And while it's understandable to be more excited about holiday parties with friends and family, a comprehensive review of your retirement plan accounts is a task that should make it to the top of your year-end to-do list. After all, even the most comprehensive strategy needs regular maintenance to ensure that you are staying on track with your retirement savings goals.

Here are a few essential steps to include in your year-end analysis:

Review your account statements. Here, you'll want to ensure that your reported contributions are accurate and being credited to the correct investment accounts.

Assess your portfolio. Be sure that your asset allocation is still in line with your overall retirement goals and risk tolerance. If your asset allocation has gotten out of alignment with your original intentions, you might consider account rebalancing.

Stay informed. To keep current on retirement saving and investing trends, take advantage of the educational materials and workshops offered by your employer.

Evaluate your contribution amount. Could you increase it to boost your retirement savings? Even a small jump (e.g., 1 percent more annually) can be a difference maker when you retire. Plus, if your employer matches a portion of your contributions—which is free money for your retirement—be sure to contribute enough to take full advantage of the match!

Remember, devoting just a few minutes to review your accounts at year-end can set you up for long-term success!



Healthy Living: Getting Your ZZZs

Sleep is critical to good health, well-being, and productivity, but many people don't get enough shut-eye. Physicians generally recommend seven to nine hours of sleep each night for adults. If you are not in that range, think about these tips from Arianna Huffington's 2016 book, *The Sleep Revolution*, for getting the sleep you need:

- Keep your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool (between 60 degrees and 67 degrees).
- Don't use any electronic devices starting 30 minutes before you go to bed.
- Don't charge your phone next to your bed. In fact, keep all electronic devices out of your bedroom.
- When reading in bed, choose a real book or an e-reader that does not emit blue light. Also, try to ensure that the reading is not work related.
- Do not have caffeine after 2:00 P.M.

Pleasant dreams!

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