

FINANCIAL JOURNEYS

FINANCIAL & RETIREMENT PLANNING FOR LIFE



10 essential numbers for health and wealth

To gauge your fiscal and physical fitness, you need to know these digits like you know your PIN code.

We keep a treasure trove of meaningful data in our heads: our height, age, computer passwords, debit card PIN, salary. But there are some numbers we don't often think about that, if left ignored, could significantly impact your fiscal and physical health.

Take the case of Adam Schuda, a 36-year-old surgical tech. He told Consumer Reports that while filing his taxes in early 2019, he obtained his credit score and found a surprise: new accounts that he hadn't opened, the work of an identity thief. "My credit score dropped about 60 points or more, taking me from good to poor credit," he said, impacting his borrowing power. Of the 200 million Americans with FICO credit scores, a little less than 3 million, or about 1.4%, have a perfect 850 credit score according to Fair Isaac Corp.

Then there's your cholesterol levels. Having less than 200 milligrams of cholesterol per deciliter of blood is generally desirable, and anything higher becomes a serious risk factor for heart disease, according to the American Heart Association. In most cases, there aren't symptoms that would give you a clue of high cholesterol and the plaque it can cause in your arteries, so it's important to get periodic blood tests and an annual physical. It's also important to know that genetics play a large role, so a healthy lifestyle alone may not be enough of a safeguard.

**95 million**

The number of U.S. adults age 20 or older who have high cholesterol. A healthy adult should have their levels checked every five years.

Source: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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10 essential numbers for health and wealth^(cont.)

Like canaries in a coal mine, these kinds of numbers can act as sentinels of our physical and financial well-being. We've rounded up 10 of these data points that are key indicators of how you're doing.



Your physical health, by the numbers

<200 mg/dL

No more than 200 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol per deciliter (dL) of blood. Within that, recommended levels of LDL (bad) and HDL (good) cholesterol vary.

Regular blood pressure indicates good heart health. Significantly higher or lower numbers could indicate medical problems.

120/80

≤100 mg/dL

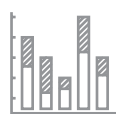
Triglycerides measure fat found in blood and are an indicator of heart health. Less than 100 mg/dL is ideal; 200 or above is cause for concern.

The number of heartbeats per minute for an adult's normal resting heart rate. Rates consistently above or below may warrant medical attention.

60-100

≤100 mg/dL

Fasting blood glucose should be under this; higher numbers indicate a risk of diabetes. Type 2 diabetes affects about 1 in 10 Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control.



Your fiscal health, digit by digit

740-799

The range of "very good" FICO credit scores (800-plus is exceptional). The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recommends checking your credit reports at least once a year. You can request one free copy of your report every 12 months from each of the three nationwide credit reporting agencies at annualcreditreport.com.

An annual net worth statement can help track changes.

**Assets – liabilities =
Net worth**

<36%

Debt is often a necessity, but your debt-to-income ratio should be below 36% for favorable lending rates. Anything higher could be a sign of financial problems. Pay off debts with high interest rates first.

The top federal income tax rate. Knowing your rate factors into your tax planning strategies (it can even affect your Medicare rates).

37%

**(Income –
spending)
/ Income =
Saving rate**

Everyone's saving rate is different. However, higher percentage savers (say 15% of income for retirement and 10% for other goals) save on borrowing costs and may be able to achieve goals more easily.

NEXT STEPS

- At your annual checkup, ask your doctor whether you're due for any blood tests.
- Ask your advisor about fine-tuning your saving and spending rates.
- Request your credit report at annualcreditreport.com at least once a year.



Silencing phone scams

Bills in Congress offer hope for an end to illegal robocalls. Apps and blocking tools can help in the meantime.

Robocalls – the spammy, scam-ridden kind – have become a constant nuisance for most Americans who own a phone. By some estimates, billions of robocalls are placed in the U.S. every day. That’s in part because they are lucrative for scheming criminals. Consumers lost \$10.5 billion to phone scams in 2018, according to blocking and tracking firm Truecaller.

Thankfully, the government is taking action to cut the lines on con artists. In June, the Federal Communications Commission ruled that phone companies can take aggressive action to block unwanted calls for their customers by default. And in July, the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act won approval in the House, building on the TRACED Act passed by the Senate in May. The national legislation would strengthen regulators’ enforcement tools and require phone carriers to implement call identification technology. In the meantime, here are some apps and blocking tips that can help you keep robocalls from blowing up your phone.

GET HELP FROM YOUR PHONE CARRIER

Major wireless and landline providers offer tools that either label or block suspicious robocalls, and some are free. Now that the FCC has given carriers free rein to block calls, these services may soon become an automatic, built-in feature. But until then, you can use tools available through your carrier to silence the spam.

MANUALLY BLOCK CELL CALLS

If you only want calls from people you know to ring through on your cellphone, the Do Not Disturb feature is your friend. On either an iPhone or an Android, turn on Do Not Disturb in Set-

tings and then select the option that only allows calls from your contacts. (Note that when a stranger you want to talk to calls, it will show up as a “missed call” and will not ring through.)

TRY A THIRD-PARTY BLOCKING APP

If you go this route, be sure to download the app from the official Google Play or iOS App Store. Two of the most reputable are RoboKiller (\$1 a month) and Nomorobo (\$2 a month), which can help restore normalcy to your cellphone. Note that Nomorobo is free for customers of VoIP carriers, including AT&T U-verse, Verizon Fios, Comcast Xfinity and Cox. If you have an old landline on copper wire, there isn’t a lot you can do except screen your calls. ■



Consumers lost **\$10.5 billion**
to phone scams in **2018**

NEXT STEPS

- Talk to your advisor about smart ways you can protect yourself from fraud in general.
- Check in with elderly loved ones who might be receiving a flood of scam calls.
- Consider adding safeguards like a trusted contact to help safeguard financial accounts.



How to quarterback a family huddle

As you gather with loved ones for the holidays, consider discussing your legacy plans.

When it comes to financial matters, it's common for family members to have different visions, ideas and values, which can sometimes lead to breakdowns in trust and communication. As you gather with family for the holidays, consider having a frank, open discussion – a family huddle – about family financial matters and your plans and wishes. These open dialogues can help prevent problems long before they start. Here are some guidelines on how to lead a family huddle.

CREATE A GAME PLAN

As soon as possible, in fact. By holding these meetings years before they're critically needed, you can control the conversation and approach more sensitive topics in a positive way. The holidays can be a good time for these discussions, since everyone is already gathered together and typically in a positive frame of mind.

INCLUDE THE RIGHT PLAYERS

For some families, this might mean immediate family members only; for others, it's extended relatives, too. You'll have to decide what's right for your family, but at the very least, you and your spouse or partner should be on the same page. Having one-on-one conversations with certain members before the family gathering may also help you create a constructive agenda and avoid surprises.

OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Topics of discussion will vary, but consider discussing matters that impact the smooth transition of wealth. These might include the location of estate documents, succession plans for a business, intentions behind distribution guidelines, and even funeral and burial preferences. Also be mindful of life changes among family members (births, deaths, marriages, divorces, etc.) that can affect legacy planning. As you discuss these topics, allow family members to express their thoughts, feelings and questions.

GO THE EXTRA YARD

After the huddle, review what was discussed and how new information may impact your financial and estate plans. Consider introducing those family members who are or will be closely involved in your affairs to your professional advisors (accountants, lawyers, financial advisors, etc.) if you feel it's appropriate. And most importantly, plan to huddle up again to keep the conversation going. ■

NEXT STEPS

- If these family conversations revealed a change in plans, follow up with your financial and tax advisors.
- Think about including your advisor in a family huddle as a neutral third party who can guide a discussion on charitable giving or legacy planning.
- Talk to your advisor about secure ways to store and share legacy and longevity planning documents.