

LET'S TALK MONEY

September/October 2024

Calming Your Money Fears

Whether you're retired or just thinking about it, feeling as if you have no control over future events can cause stress that affects your well-being. Developing a strategy with the aid of your financial professional to address your concerns can help mitigate your fears.

What's Bothering You?

Money issues? Health issues? Market downturns? Identifying your fears should be the first step in coming up with a strategy to overcome them. Putting a name to things that are causing you stress can set you on the right track to finding solutions.

Think About Your Goals

What are your plans for the future? Travel? Pursuing hobbies? Starting a business? Identifying concrete goals that you're saving for can bring them into sharper focus. Visualizing what you want your life to look like in retirement can make the future seem less intimidating.

Assess Your Financial Picture

Do a deep dive into your finances with the help of your advisor. Does your current financial situation align with your future goals? Designing a strategy that moves you closer to your goals while reducing risk may lessen your anxiety. Diversifying your portfolio and setting up an emergency fund for unexpected expenses can provide a cushion in the event of a market downturn or unexpected loss of income.

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Protect Yourself in a Health Crisis

The financial impact of a medical event can be devastating if you don't have adequate insurance. Reviewing your health insurance to ensure you have sufficient coverage in the event of an illness or injury can remove a major stressor from your life.

Fear of a Market Downturn

For many investors nearing or in retirement, the possibility of portfolio losses due to a significant drop in market values is their biggest fear. While you can't predict what the markets will do, you can take steps to shield your savings from market volatility. Adjust your asset allocation to balance growth with asset preservation by holding fixed-income investments in addition to stocks in your portfolio. Since stock and bond values typically move in opposite directions, bonds may provide a cushion during a market downturn.

**Asset allocation won't guarantee a profit or ensure against a loss but may help reduce volatility in your portfolio.*

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Life Insurance: Consider Your Options

Life insurance* proceeds can provide a financial lifeline for loved ones if something were to happen to you. The type of policy you choose may depend on the length of time you'll need coverage and the policy's cost.

Term Insurance

Term insurance provides coverage for a specific period, typically 10 to 30 years, although shorter and longer terms are possible. If you die during the term, the policy pays a death benefit to your beneficiaries. A term policy has no cash value. It is less expensive than permanent insurance and may be a good choice when others depend on your income.

Permanent Insurance

Permanent insurance generally remains in effect if you continue to pay the premiums. In addition to the death benefit, the policy builds cash value over time. Permanent insurance is a good option if you want lifetime coverage, access to the policy's cash value through withdrawals or loans and are comfortable with the higher premiums.

Your insurance professional can help you choose the right policy for your circumstances.



**Applications for life insurance are subject to underwriting. No insurance coverage exists unless the required premium is paid to put an issued policy in force. Accessing cash values may reduce the death benefit and policy values, trigger tax consequences, surrender fees, and charges, and may require additional premium payments to maintain the contract. Guarantees are based on the claims-paying ability of the issuer.*

Understanding Beneficiary Designations

Your will is an important document for passing assets to loved ones when you die, but it doesn't apply to everything. Life insurance proceeds, retirement accounts, annuities and similar accounts pass through beneficiary designations and are not governed by your will.

Review Your Selections

You chose a beneficiary when you initially set up your accounts. But things can change. Divorce, death of a beneficiary or even a change in your intentions can affect your selections. Revisit your designations periodically to ensure they're up to date.

Check Old Accounts

Forgetting about 401(k) or other retirement accounts held with former employers can result in outdated beneficiary designations. Remember to include these accounts in your review.

Avoid Mistakes

Take special circumstances into account when you're

naming beneficiaries. Minors will not be able to claim assets until they turn 18 or 21 (depending on the state). Individuals with special needs can lose valuable government benefits if they receive an inheritance directly. Setting up a trust to receive the assets may help in both situations.



Keep in mind that godparents are not the same as legal guardians but could be a good choice to serve as trustees.

Integrate with Estate Planning

Your financial professional can help you review your beneficiary designations as an integral part of your estate plan.

The “New” Identity Theft

As if stealing your personal information to access your bank accounts or open credit in your name isn't enough to worry about, there's another form of identity theft taking hold. Deed theft is a type of identity theft that targets your residence, second home or other property.

How It Happens

Thieves target a potential property — often a vacation home, second home or vacant property. Criminals forge the owner's signature on the deed and sell the home to themselves or a third party. They then use personal information found on the Internet to assume your identity or to represent you when they record the deed with the county.

They're Not Moving In

Once thieves have the deed to your property, they can:

- Sell your home and keep the profit
- Refinance the mortgage to cash out equity
- Open a home equity line of credit
- Illegally rent out unoccupied property



Protect Yourself

You can take steps to protect yourself and your property from deed theft.

- Monitor your credit reports for loans you didn't take out or for other suspicious activity.
- Check for liens against your property from contractors, subcontractors or attorneys.
- Visit vacant homes periodically to make sure no one is living in them.
- Have your mail forwarded, kept at the post office or picked up by someone when you're away from home.
- Pay close attention to mortgage, tax, water and other home-related bills.
- Check your county recorder's office or local registry online for land records and property deeds. You may be able to set up notifications at the registry to alert you to changes.

If Something Is Amiss

Notify the register of deeds as well as law enforcement if you find evidence of deed theft or other criminal activity. Obtain a certified copy of the fraudulent document and consult an attorney.

Selling Your Home?

Homeowners who qualify may exclude up to \$250,000 of gain (\$500,000 for married couples) from the sale of a primary residence.



Eligibility

To be eligible for the capital gains tax exclusion, you must have owned your home and used it as your primary residence for at least two out of the last five years prior to the sale. The exclusion can be claimed once every two years. You'll pay capital gains tax on any profits exceeding the exclusion amount, so keep accurate records of the purchase price and any improvements made to the property.

Exceptions

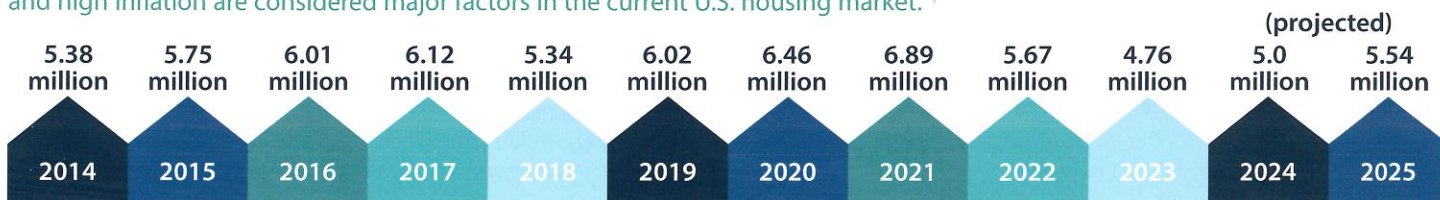
Because the IRS doesn't consider certain transfers to be a gain or loss, the exclusion rules don't apply if you're transferring a home to a spouse or ex-spouse or the home is a factor in a separation, divorce or the death of a spouse.

Partial Exclusion

If the reason for a home sale involves a change in work location, a health issue or an unforeseeable event, the sale may qualify for a partial exclusion. Consult your tax professional for guidance.

A Decade of Home Sales

U.S. home sales are projected to pick up slightly in 2024 and 2025, following a decade low in 2023. High mortgage interest rates and high inflation are considered major factors in the current U.S. housing market.



Source: Statista Research Department, March 14, 2024

Is Retiring Abroad on Your Bucket List?

A warmer climate, a lower cost of living, a charming locale — there are many reasons Americans choose to spend retirement living in a foreign country. If retiring outside the U.S. appeals to you, plan your move carefully and consider the impact living abroad may have on your daily life.

Two Bank Accounts

Set up an account at a local bank several months in advance of your move to make sure the account is open and available to you when you arrive. You'll also want to maintain an account in the states to receive retirement account distributions and Social Security benefits. (Social Security will also deposit benefits in bank accounts in most foreign countries.) Keep in mind that currency exchange rates fluctuate, which can affect the cost of living abroad.

Uncle Sam Wants His Share

Your income is subject to U.S. income tax no matter where you're living, so you will have to file your taxes in the U.S. Some countries have tax treaties with the U.S. that may save you money. Consult a tax professional to make sure you're taking advantage of any tax benefits available to you.

Rent or Buy?

It's easy to get swept away by the charms of a new place, but it's smart to spend time in your chosen location before committing to

buying a home. An English-speaking relocation consultant can help you with an apartment search and rental agreement. If you eventually decide to buy, hire an attorney who understands the local market.

Healthcare Concerns

Medicare will not cover you outside of the U.S., so make sure you evaluate the healthcare system in your chosen country — specifically, what services are covered, the quality of care and the costs. Consider retaining parts of Medicare so you won't have to re-enroll and incur penalties if you return to the U.S.

Enroll in STEP

Open to U.S. citizens traveling or living abroad, the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) allows you to enroll your trip/stay with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Enrollment helps the Embassy and your family and friends contact you in an emergency.



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