

## Monitoring Your Identity for Fraud

As many as 143 million Americans may be in danger of identity theft as a result of the recent data breach at Equifax, one of the three U.S. credit bureaus. Identity theft can be very time consuming and expensive to correct. There are businesses that will monitor your credit history for a fee, but you can also self-monitor to lower your risk for identity theft. Use these tips to monitor your identity at no cost.

### Credit Monitoring Services

Check with your bank or credit card issuer in order to determine whether or not they offer credit monitoring services.

Most banks can notify you via free online or mobile alerts as soon as any suspicious account activity is detected. This could include telephone or Internet transactions, international purchases, or transactions over a specific dollar amount.

### Report and Dispute

Review credit card and bank statements and report and dispute any unauthorized transactions.

Check your monthly billing and account statements promptly when they arrive. Quickly report and dispute any erroneous or suspicious information with card issuers, financial institutions and vendors as necessary. You might also want to monitor utility bills for any unauthorized purchases or services.

You have the right to withhold payment for a disputed amount without penalty until the card issuer can investigate the claim and make a final determination.

Consider signing up for online access to your accounts in order to monitor activity and transactions on a daily basis.

### Credit Report

Review credit reports and report any incorrect information. You are entitled to a free credit report from each of the three major credit bureaus (Equifax, TransUnion and Experian) each year. Unless you are already a victim of identity theft, it is advisable to request a report from one of the credit bureaus every four months.

You are also entitled to a free report from each of the major credit bureaus when you place an initial fraud alert on your credit report file.

Check your report for any information that you do not recognize, such as liens, judgments, bankruptcies, accounts and any other possible indications of identity theft. Report and dispute any fraudulent or incorrect information.

### Fraud Alerts

Place a free fraud alert on your credit report file. You can request this through any of the three major credit bureaus. You only need to request this through one of the bureaus, which will communicate the request to the other two. This alert will need to be renewed every 90 days and gives lenders additional steps to take in order to confirm your identification before issuing a new line of credit.

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