



If you think your identity may have been compromised, or you know that you have been the victim of some form of identity theft, there are steps you can take to begin to restore your identity and limit additional headaches:

- 1. Initiate a Fraud Alert:** If you are concerned that your personal information may have been exposed in a data breach, if your wallet has been stolen, or if you know that you are a victim of identity theft, you should consider placing a Fraud Alert on your credit file. There is no cost to placing a fraud alert, and the type of fraud alert that is appropriate for you will depend on your circumstances.

Initial Fraud Alert: You can place an Initial Fraud Alert on your credit file even before you know you have been a victim of identity theft. To place an initial fraud alert, you should contact at least one of the three major credit bureaus and ask them to place an initial fraud alert on your file. You can contact all three, but even if you only contact one, they are required to notify the other two. This process will allow you to provide a statement about your circumstances and a phone number where anyone accessing your credit report can contact you. This process puts any potential creditor on notice that additional measures should be taken to verify that it is really you attempting to establish a credit relationship. An initial fraud alert lasts for one year, can be renewed if desired, and provides you with a free copy of your credit report. Placing a fraud alert is not the same as freezing your credit, and even if you have frozen your credit, it is still recommended that you put the fraud alert on your file if you are concerned about identity theft. This additional layer of protection would only be seen by a potential creditor after they manage to access your credit report.



Learn More:

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It is always easier to protect and maintain your identity than it is to recover from identity theft

Extended Fraud Alert: If you have been a victim of identity theft, you can contact one of the three major credit bureaus and place an extended fraud alert on your file that will last for seven years. The bureau will ask you to complete a form and require you to submit your Identity Theft Report (see below). It will also notify the other two credit bureaus of your extended fraud alert. In addition, you will be eligible for two free credit reports from each of the three bureaus over the next year and will be removed from marketing lists for prescreened credit offers for five years.

- 2. Review Your Credit Reports:** If your identity has been compromised, you should obtain and review every detail of your credit reports. A second review of these may turn up important details that may have been missed previously.
- 3. File an Identity Theft Report:** If you have been the victim of any type of identity theft, you should file an identity theft report by visiting www.identitytheft.gov. This website is maintained by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and is a clearing house for fraud reporting.

Although there are other ways to file a fraud report with the FTC, doing so online and establishing an account allows you to update your identity theft report as you learn more, and provides recommended action steps to address the details of your circumstances including tailored letters that you can send to help remedy your situation. This will enable you to go back in and “check off” the steps you have accomplished. You will need your identity theft report to place an extended fraud alert and to correct some items that are incorrect on your credit reports.

- 4. Change your Passwords:** Periodically updating your passwords is always advisable, but doing so when your identity has been compromised is even more important. Remember to use unique, hard-to-guess passwords. If you have been the victim of an internet crime, consider filing a complaint with the Federal Bureau of Investigation Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) at www.ic3.gov/Home/ComplaintChoice/.
- 5. Contact Creditors, Banks, and Other Organizations:** As will likely be detailed in the identity theft report recovery plan, you should, at a minimum, contact any organizations where you have accounts or where anyone has attempted to open an account in your name. This may involve closing accounts in some circumstances. If your medical or insurance records have been compromised, you should work to correct the inaccuracies.
- 6. Consider Filing a Police Report:** If you have been the victim of identity theft, contact your local police department. They can help you decide if filing a police report is appropriate for your situation.
- 7. File Tax Returns as Early as Possible:** Tax-related identity theft occurs when someone assumes your identity with a taxing authority. This can be as simple as filing a fraudulent return with your taxpayer information and claiming a refund for all or part of the taxes you may have paid.



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It is always advisable to file your income tax returns as soon as practical, but if you believe your information may have been compromised you should truly prioritize filing your return as soon as possible. If you are concerned about tax-related identity theft, request a tax transcript from the IRS online at www.irs.gov/individuals/get-transcript.

If you are a victim of tax-related identity theft or some other identity theft, you should consider completing IRS Form 14039 – Identity Theft Affidavit.

Final Thoughts

It is always easier to protect and maintain your identity than it is to recover from identity theft. Taking proactive steps today to secure your identity, including reviewing your credit reports and freezing your credit, can ultimately save you significant time and stress. If your identity is compromised, quick and decisive action can help to limit the damage.



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