



# Identity Theft & Recovery



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Protect your identity and know exactly what to do if it's misused.

Identity theft is a gateway crime behind many scams (account takeovers, tax fraud, loan fraud). In 2023, the FTC's systems logged *over 1 million* identity theft reports nationwide, and older adults reported *\$3.4 billion* in cybercrime losses to the FBI's IC3 that same year. These steps help you prevent, detect, and recover—without paying third-party “protection” services.

Sources: FTC Consumer Sentinel (2023 Data Book & press release) and FBI IC3 Elder Fraud Report (2023).



## Trusted Resources

**IdentityTheft.gov (FTC)** — Official federal one-stop site: file a report and get a step-by-step recovery plan tailored to your situation. <https://www.identitytheft.gov/> ↗

**FTC — Consumer Sentinel Data (Stats)** — Annual data on fraud & identity theft reports; 2023 featured over 5.4M total consumer reports, with 1M+ identity theft reports.




# Identity Theft & Recovery



 <https://www.ftc.gov/reports/consumer-sentinel-network-data-book-2023> ↗

**FTC — Nationwide Fraud Losses Top \$10B (2023)** — Overview press release noting 1M+ identity theft reports in 2023.


 <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2024/02/nationwide-fraud-losses-top-10-billion-2023-ftc-steps-efforts-protect-public> ↗

**FBI — IC3 Elder Fraud Reports** — Annual stats and reporting portal for online crime affecting older adults.

 <https://www.ic3.gov/> ↗

**AnnualCreditReport.com** — Access your credit reports from all three bureaus; detect new accounts or changes quickly.

 <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action> ↗

**IRS — Get an IP PIN** — Prevents someone else from filing a tax return using your SSN; free six-digit PIN the IRS requires on your return.  <https://www.irs.gov/identity-theft-fraud-scams/get-an-identity-protection-pin> ↗

## Preventing Identity Theft (Do-It-Yourself)

**Freeze your credit** with all three bureaus (free, reversible). A freeze blocks new credit lines in your name. Unfreeze temporarily when you need to apply.

**Turn on 2-Factor Authentication (2FA)** for email, bank, and payment apps. Prefer an authenticator app or hardware key where possible.

**Use a password manager** and make each password unique and long (passphrases). Reused passwords = chain-reaction takeovers.

**Secure your mailbox & documents** (lockable mailbox; shred sensitive mail). Sign up for USPS Informed Delivery to watch what's coming.

**Review your credit reports** at least quarterly (all three bureaus). Dispute any account you didn't open.

## If You Suspect Identity Theft

**Go to IdentityTheft.gov** and generate your recovery plan and FTC report number. Follow the specific steps provided.



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**Place a 1-year fraud alert** (free) at any one bureau—they'll notify the others. Consider an extended alert (7 years) after filing a police report.

**Change passwords & 2FA** starting with email, bank, and payment apps. Remove unfamiliar recovery phones/emails from those accounts.

**Contact impacted companies** (banks, card issuers, utilities) and ask for their fraud team. Close or freeze affected accounts; get letters confirming actions.

**File police report** if instructed by your plan (often required for extended alerts and certain disputes).



## Sam's Tips

**Freeze beats "monitoring."** A credit freeze stops new accounts; monitoring only alerts you after the fact.

**Your email is the master key.** Protect it with a strong, unique password and 2FA—most recovery links flow through email.

**Document everything.** Keep a folder with your FTC report number, dispute letters, and call notes. Paper trails speed recovery.

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**Act fast, then follow through.** Early steps (freeze, alerts, password changes) limit damage—and finishing the checklist closes back doors.