



# Manage My Checking Account

You can use these strategies to help you manage your checking account.

## Read the rules of your account

You should read the rules of your accounts or ask a customer service representative at your financial institution questions, so you understand the rules. You may want to ask about:

- **Fees.** What kind of fees are there, and when are they charged? What can you do to avoid paying the fees?
- **Balances.** Is there a minimum balance you have to keep in your account? What happens if your account goes below that amount?
- **Overdrafts.** What happens if a transaction is for more money than you currently have in your account? Does the account offer a program to handle overdrafts? How does it work?

## Keep track of your deposits and withdrawals

**Online and/or mobile access.** If your account provides online and/or mobile access, you can use a mobile app, your financial institution's online banking system, or another program to regularly track your checking account use. It usually gives real-time or almost real-time information.

**Account balance.** Transactions may not show up online or in the mobile app immediately, or they may show up as "pending" or may not be subtracted from your balance yet. For example, often the tip you add to a restaurant bill you pay with a debit card may not show up right away. It's important to realize that the account balance shown online or in your mobile app may not reflect all of the purchases or payments you have already made.

**Track your transactions.** You also need to keep track of transactions that will take place in the future, such as automatic deposits or automatic payments. They likely won't show up online or in the app until they happen. However, you need to know when they will happen to make sure you have enough money in your account to cover them.

**Keep records.** You can also keep your own records. You may receive a small booklet called a transaction register or check register to help you track transactions. If you choose to use the register, make sure to record:

- Each check you write
- Each deposit you make
- Each ATM withdrawal you make
- Every automatic payment you authorize from this account
- Every automatic deposit you authorize into this account
- Every purchase or cash back transaction you make with your debit card
- Every fee you are charged

## Monitor your account activity frequently

**Monitor your account activity online if possible.** Many financial institutions have mobile apps that can show you real-time or near real-time transactions and account balances. If there are any deposits or withdrawals that don't look right or you know you didn't make, tell your financial institution right away.

**Review your monthly account statements.** Some financial institutions give you the option of reviewing your statements online. If you request online statements only (choosing "paperless"), you may have to pay a fee if you also want a paper statement. However, if you need a paper copy of your statements as a reasonable accommodation, ask for that.

**Keep track of holds on your debit card.** An "authorization hold" may be placed on your funds if you use your debit card at a gas station, to make a rental car reservation, or to pay for a hotel room. Holds reduce the money available in your account. Depending on the business, an authorization hold may last up to 15 days.

**Set up email or text alerts.** Many financial institutions offer several alerts regarding your account. For example, you may be able to receive an email, a text message, or both when balances fall below a certain level, when there is a transaction over a certain amount, or when a transaction is made outside of the United States.

## Ask about linking accounts

Ask your financial institution if it can link your checking account to your savings account or a line of credit. If your financial institution provides this service, the financial institution can then automatically transfer money between accounts if you empty your checking account. The transfer fee may be considerably less than an overdraft fee.

## Protect your debit card or ATM card

**Be wary of unsolicited calls or text messages** asking you for your card number or personal identification number, called a PIN. If you lose your debit card, or you notice an unfamiliar purchase on your statement, report it to your financial institution immediately.

## Stay safe online

**Make sure websites are secure** if you are entering personal or financial information. Only give personal and financial information using encrypted websites.

- **Encryption means the information is secure.** The data is changed into code before it is transmitted. That masks the information in case it is intercepted by thieves.
- **Check to see how the web browser you use indicates if a website is encrypted.** For example, there may be a lock symbol or the letters https:// may be in front of the web address.

**Be careful on public Wi-Fi networks**, as they may or may not be secure.

**Make sure your passwords are difficult to guess.** Mix lowercase and uppercase letters with numbers and, if permitted, symbols. Avoid keyboard patterns, such as "1234," and don't use names, numbers, or words connected with you, like a birthday, name of pets or relatives, or phone number.

For more information about online security, visit **OnGuardOnline.gov** (ftc.gov).