



# 10 WAYS TO PREVENT IDENTITY THEFT

In this digital world, your sensitive information is only safe if you know how to protect it. If it falls into the wrong hands, your identity could be at risk, and the consequences could be severe. Make sure you know the facts about identity theft prevention to protect yourself and your family.

## 1. Use strong passwords

Create passwords that employ a combination of uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. Steer clear of obvious passwords—never use your birth date, mother’s maiden name, or the last four digits of your Social Security number. Remember: The easier it is to remember, the easier it is for an identity thief to crack.

## 2. Lock up your records

Keep any financial documents and records containing your sensitive information in a secure place in your home or office. Try to avoid carrying around items that contain your personal information.

## 3. Shred sensitive documents

Tear, cut up, or shred sensitive materials, such as old records, files, bills, prescription labels, or expired credit cards, with a cross-cutting shredder before disposing of them. Once information leaves your hands, there’s no way of knowing who will get hold of it.

## 4. Secure your wireless network

Like public or shared computers, unprotected wireless networks can place sensitive information in jeopardy. Make sure your wireless network at home is protected.

## 5. Lock your computer

If you are using a computer at your office or in a public place, make sure to lock it before you walk away to safeguard any personal information stored on the computer.

## 6. Protect against viruses

Regularly update anti-virus protection software on your computer. In addition, keep your computer system and browser up to date and set at the highest security level.

## 7. Double-check mailings and faxes

Always make sure that documents aren’t stuck together and that the recipient’s information is correct before sending any personally identifiable information. When faxing sensitive data, contact the recipient before and after transmissions to verify that it was received by the correct person.

## 8. Keep your emails safe

Avoid sending any sensitive information via email. If you absolutely have to use email to send personal data, consider purchasing encryption software. Encrypting emails is the only way to ensure that the information you are sending is received securely.

## 9. Use social media responsibly

Assume that anything you post online can be accessed by anyone. An identity thief can use the information he or she learns about you on social media sites to answer “challenge” questions and potentially gain access to your personal accounts. Monitor your social media security settings and consider limiting access to your page to a small number of people.

## 10. Be prepared

Education is always the first line of defense. Take a moment to visit the More Than a Number website at [www.va.gov/identitytheft](http://www.va.gov/identitytheft) to learn more tips about identity theft prevention.

Visit [www.va.gov/identitytheft](http://www.va.gov/identitytheft) to learn how to prevent identity theft.

More Than a Number is overseen by VA’s Identity Safety Service within the Office of Information Security.



**MORE**  
THAN A NUMBER  
DEFEND VETERANS' IDENTITIES