



THE EDUCATED INVESTOR

A Guide to Retirement Planning



FEATURED ARTICLE

The Importance of Emergency Savings

Many financial experts recommend setting aside enough money to cover three to six months' worth of expenses in the event of a major financial surprise.

Did you know that most financial experts recommend setting aside enough money to cover three to six months' worth of expenses in the event of a major financial surprise? That's because a well-funded emergency account has the potential to get you through tough times without the need to spend other savings, such as assets earmarked for retirement and college.

The following tips will help you start saving more right away:

Stick to a Budget: Creating a budget is easier and more important than you may think. Just write down the amount of your household's total monthly after-tax income, and then identify how much money you need to spend every month on bills, groceries, etc.

Next, subtract the latter amount from the former. The difference represents the amount of money available to be set aside for important goals, such as accumulating emergency savings. Try to maintain financial discipline by avoiding unnecessary "impulse items" that aren't in your budget or on your shopping list.

Buy in Bulk: When it comes to smart shopping, bigger is often better. That's because buying one item at a time is usually more expensive than buying larger quantities. For example, instead of purchasing one can of food at a time, you may be able to find the same items at a much lower "unit cost" when they're packaged and sold in bulk at a discount retailer or shoppers' club. While you'll spend more up front, the "economies of scale" may help improve your bottom line within a month or two.

Reduce the Cost of Debt: Every month, millions of Americans spend their hard-earned money on interest and finance charges that arise from carrying personal debt, such as credit card balances. Take advantage of today's exceptionally low interest rates by transferring high-interest debt to a single, low-rate account. Then, if you own a home, consider paying off the entire balance with a tax-deductible home equity loan. And needless to say, don't use credit to buy things you can't really afford.

Finally, whenever you're expecting a tax refund, bonus or other windfall, be sure to put it to good use. Paying off debt and saving for the future are almost always better strategies than spending without a plan.

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Naming Beneficiaries: What You Need To Know

This article explains why one of the most important issues in estate planning is whom to name as beneficiaries on life insurance policies, pension plan accounts, IRAs, and annuities.

A major issue in estate planning is whom to name as beneficiaries on life insurance policies, pension plan accounts, IRAs, and annuities. This important decision often doesn't take into account the substantial estate and income tax consequences the beneficiary may incur. So before you name a beneficiary, you may wish to gain a basic understanding of beneficiary designations.

One of the first things you need to know is that, in many cases, beneficiary designations supersede a will. That said, not only is naming a beneficiary important, it is equally important to make sure that your beneficiary arrangements are consistent with your other estate planning documents.

Not All Beneficiary Designations Are The Same

You can name a beneficiary for many different financial products and investment vehicles. And each has some subtle nuances that are sometimes difficult to discern. In addition, because naming a beneficiary is a legal arrangement, there is certain language you must use to ensure your wishes are accurately recorded and executed.

That's why it is important to consult with a qualified financial professional when making decisions about beneficiaries. Aside from determining whom you will name as your beneficiary, you'll also need to consider the following:

- **Age of beneficiary:** Most policies and plans will not directly transfer assets to minors until a trustee or guardian is approved by a court.
- **Ability of beneficiary to manage assets:** Perhaps a trust set up in the person's name would be better than a direct transfer.
- **Pension plans:** Unless waived by the spouse in writing, the law requires a spouse to be the primary beneficiary of the account.
Professional Assistance a Must

Naming beneficiaries is a complex matter that requires a great deal of forethought to help ensure that your decisions are in concert with your financial and estate planning goals. A qualified financial professional can assist you in reviewing your beneficiary designation and help you make choices that are appropriate for your situation.

This information is not intended to be a substitute for specific individualized tax or legal advice. We suggest that you discuss your specific situation with a qualified tax or legal advisor.

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Halloween Peanut Butter Cookie Pops



Ingredients

- *1/2 cup butter, softened
- *1/2 cup creamy peanut butter
- *1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- *1/2 cup sugar
- *1 egg
- *1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- *1-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- *1/2 teaspoon baking powder
- *1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- *1/4 teaspoon salt
- *12 lollipop sticks
- *12 fun-size Snickers or Milky Way candy bars
- *Prepared vanilla frosting
- *Food coloring
- *Black decorating gel
- *Optional decorations: Reese's mini peanut butter cups, M&M's minis, mini Chiclets gum and candy eyeballs

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°. In a small bowl, cream butter, peanut butter and sugars until blended. Beat in egg and vanilla. In a small bowl, whisk flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt; gradually beat into creamed mixture.
2. Insert a lollipop stick into the small end of each candy bar. Divide dough into 12 pieces; wrap one piece around each candy bar. Place 4 in. apart on ungreased baking sheets.
3. Bake 14-16 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on pans 10 minutes; remove to wire racks to cool completely. Tint frosting; frost cookies. Decorate with gel and optional decorations as desired. **Yields: 1 Dozen**

SOURCE: <http://www.tasteofhome.com>



5 Fun Halloween Activities For The Whole Family

There's so much more to Halloween than just trick-or-treating! Make Halloween special for your family this year by with new traditions they will love!

1. Boo your neighbors or friends

This is a fun tradition that is sure to get your entire family in the spirit of Halloween. It's known by a few different names, but the essence is always the same -- put together a little Halloween package filled with goodies and treats and leave it on the doorstep of your favorite neighbor. Include instructions that they need to pass the Halloween love along.

2. Visit the library for some spooky books

There are some really great, fun Halloween books and a trip to your local library to stock up on some for the holiday will surely spook-up your bedtime stories.

3. Plan a deliciously frightful dinner

Halloween pulls out all of the stops when it comes to creative recipes, so why not plan an entire meal full of Halloween recipes.

4. Have a Halloween fashion show

Do your kids have a huge collection of dress-up clothes? Pull them all out of the playroom for a silly Halloween fashion show. For older kids, make some cards with costume ideas. Have them pick one idea from a hat and then make them pull together a costume to match that idea.

5. Turn out the lights for a night of ghost stories

Sometimes the most fun part of Halloween is that all of the activities happen in the dark! Pop some popcorn, turn the lights off in the house to set the scene and then pass out flashlights and get the ghost stories going.

SOURCE: <http://www.sheknows.com>