



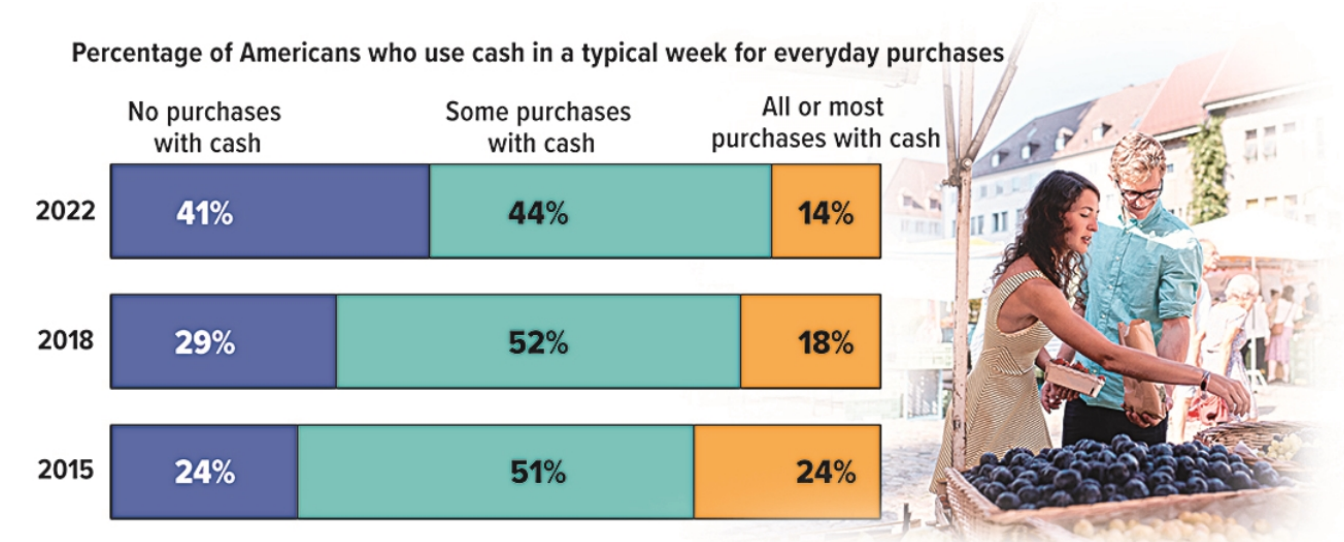
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# More Americans Embrace the Cashless Economy

A growing number of Americans are going "cashless" for everyday purchases like groceries, gas, services, and meals compared to previous years. A cashless payment might be made using a debit or credit card, or a payment app or mobile wallet on a smartphone.

In 2022, about 41% of Americans said none of their purchases in a typical week were paid for using cash, up from 29% in 2018 and 24% in 2015. Among affluent households, 59% said they didn't use cash for any typical weekly purchases. The trend of not carrying cash varies by age, with 54% of people under age 50 saying they don't worry much about whether they have cash on hand compared to 28% of people 50 and older.



Source: Pew Research Center, 2022 (numbers do not equal 100% due to rounding)

# Give Your Money a Midyear Checkup

If 2023 has been financially challenging, why not take a moment to reflect on the progress you've made and the setbacks you've faced? Getting into the habit of reviewing your finances midyear may help you keep your financial plan on track while there's still plenty of time left in the year to make adjustments.

## Goal Overhaul

Rising prices put a dent in your budget. You put off a major purchase you had planned for, such as a home or new vehicle, hoping that inventory would increase and interest rates would decrease. A major life event is coming up, such as a family wedding, college, or a job transition.

Both economic and personal events can affect your financial goals. Are your priorities still the same as they were at the beginning of the year? Have you been able to save as much as you had planned? Are your income and expenses higher or lower than you expected? You may need to make changes to prevent your budget or savings from getting too far off course this year.

## Post-Tax Season Estimate

Completing a midyear estimate of your tax liability may reveal planning opportunities. You can use last year's tax return as a basis, then factor in any anticipated adjustments to your income and deductions for this year.

Check your withholding, especially if you owed taxes or received a large refund. Doing that now, rather than waiting until the end of the year, may help you avoid a big tax bill or having too much of your money tied up with Uncle Sam.

You can check your withholding by using the IRS Tax Withholding Estimator at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov). If necessary, adjust the amount of federal income tax withheld from your paycheck by filing a new Form W-4 with your employer.

## Investment Assessment

Review your portfolio to make sure your asset allocation is still in line with your financial goals, time horizon, and tolerance for risk. How have your investments performed against appropriate benchmarks, and in relationship to your expectations and needs? Looking for new opportunities or rebalancing may be appropriate, but be cautious about making significant changes while the market is volatile.

*Asset allocation is a method used to help manage investment risk; it does not guarantee a profit or protect against investment loss. All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful.*

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## More to Consider

Here are five questions to consider as part of your midyear financial review.



Do you have an emergency fund?



Can you put more in your health savings account?



Have you checked your credit score recently?



What are the interest rates on your credit cards?



How much is left in your flexible spending account?

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## Retirement Savings Reality Check

If the value of your retirement portfolio has dipped, you may be concerned that you won't have what you need in retirement. If retirement is years away, you have time to ride out (or even take advantage of) market ups and downs. If you're still saving for retirement, look for opportunities to increase retirement plan contributions. For example, if you receive a pay increase this year, you could contribute a higher percentage of your salary to your employer-sponsored retirement plan, such as a 401(k), 403(b), or 457(b) plan. If you're age 50 or older, consider making catch-up contributions to your employer plan. For 2023, the contribution limit is \$22,500, or \$30,000 if you're eligible to make catch-up contributions.

If you are close to retirement or already retired, take another look at your retirement income needs and whether your current investment and distribution strategy will provide enough income. You can't control challenging economic cycles, but you can take steps to help minimize the impact on your retirement.

# Mutual Funds: What's in Your Portfolio?

Mutual funds pool investment dollars from many individual investors to purchase a group of selected securities aimed at meeting a particular objective. This offers a convenient way to invest across a wide range of market activity that would be difficult for most investors to do by purchasing individual securities. More than 52% of U.S. households owned mutual funds in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

Here are some basic types of funds in order of typical risk, from lowest to highest. This is just an overview — with over 7,000 funds to choose from, you should be able to find appropriate investments to pursue your financial goals.<sup>2</sup>

**Money market funds** invest in short-term debt such as commercial paper and certificates of deposit (which generally provide a fixed rate of return). They are typically used as a cash alternative and/or as a fund for settling brokerage transactions.

**Municipal bond funds** generally offer income that is free of federal income tax and may be free of state income tax if the bonds in the fund were issued from your state. Although interest income from municipal bond funds may be tax exempt, any capital gains are subject to tax. Income for some investors may be subject to state and local taxes and the federal alternative minimum tax.

**Income funds** concentrate on bonds, Treasury securities, and other income-oriented securities, and may also include stocks that have a history of paying high dividends.

**Balanced funds, hybrid funds, and growth and income funds** seek the middle ground between growth funds and income funds. They include a mix of stocks and bonds aimed at combining moderate growth potential with modest income.

**Value funds** invest in stocks of companies that appear to be undervalued by the market. They are more volatile than balanced funds, but typically offer dividend income and may have solid growth potential if the market recognizes the underlying value.

**Growth funds** invest in the stock of companies with a high potential for appreciation but low emphasis on income. They are more volatile than many types of funds.

**Global funds** invest in a combination of domestic and foreign securities. **International funds** invest primarily in foreign stock and bond markets, sometimes in specific regions or countries. There are increased risks associated with international investing, including differences in financial reporting, currency exchange risk, economic and political risk unique to a specific country, and greater share price volatility.

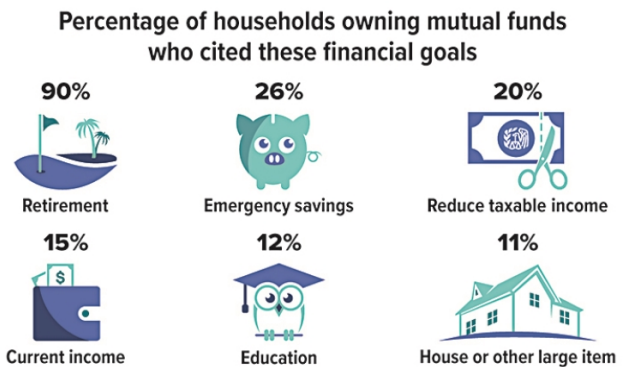
**Sector funds** invest almost exclusively in a particular industry or sector of the economy. Although they offer greater appreciation potential, the volatility and risk level are also higher because they are less diversified.

**Aggressive growth funds** aim for maximum growth. They typically distribute little income, have very high growth potential, tend to be more volatile, and are considered to be very high risk.

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## Reasons to Invest

Four out of five households who own mutual funds cited retirement as their *primary* reason for investing. However, many investors own funds to pursue multiple financial goals.



Source: Investment Company Institute, 2022 (multiple responses allowed)

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Bond funds (including funds that contain both stocks and bonds) are subject to the interest-rate, inflation, and credit risks associated with the underlying bonds. As interest rates rise, bond prices typically fall, which can adversely affect a bond fund's performance. U.S. Treasury securities are guaranteed by the federal government as to the timely payment of principal and interest. Dividends are typically not guaranteed.

Asset allocation and diversification are methods used to help manage investment risk; they do not guarantee a profit or protect against investment loss. Mutual fund shares, when sold, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Investments seeking to achieve higher returns also carry an increased level of risk.

*Money market funds are neither insured nor guaranteed by the FDIC or any other government agency. Although a money market fund attempts to maintain a stable \$1 share price, you can lose money by investing in such a fund.*

*Mutual funds are sold by prospectus. Please consider the investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses carefully before investing. The prospectus, which contains this and other information about the investment company, can be obtained from your financial professional. Be sure to read the prospectus carefully before deciding whether to invest.*

1–2) Investment Company Institute, 2022–2023

# As Your Parents Age, Help Them Protect Their Finances

It's heartbreaking to hear stories of people losing money (even their life savings) as a result of fraud or financial exploitation, especially if they are older and financially vulnerable. In fact, it's quite common. People age 70 and older reported losses of \$567 million in 2022.<sup>1</sup> You know your parents could be at risk, and you want to protect them, but how?

One place to start is by looking for warning signs that your parents have been victimized, or are at risk of being influenced, manipulated, or coerced by a stranger or someone they know.

- Unusual bank account activity, including large or unexplained withdrawals, and nonsufficient fund notices
- Missing checks, credit cards, or financial statements
- Unpaid bills
- Lost money or valuables that can't be located after a thorough search
- Relationships with people who seem to have undue influence
- Unexplained changes to legal documents
- Declining memory and decision-making skills

Regularly checking in with your parents may help you spot issues that need to be addressed. If your parents have fallen victim to a financial scam or are being pressured for money from someone they know, they may be embarrassed or reluctant to tell you, even if

you ask. Do your best to remain objective and nonjudgmental, and patiently listen to their views while expressing your own concern for their well-being.

Laying some groundwork to help prevent future incidents is also important. For example, talk to your parents about how they might handle common scams. Let them know it's a good idea to get a second opinion from you before acting on any request for information or money, even if it seems to come from their financial institution, a well-known company, law enforcement, a government agency such as the IRS or Social Security Administration, or even a grandchild in trouble.

Encourage them to set up appointments with their elder law attorney or financial professional to talk about concerns and legal and financial safeguards. They might also want to add layers of protection to their financial accounts, such as naming a trusted contact or setting up account alerts.

People are often reluctant to report financial fraud or exploitation, either out of embarrassment or fear of being wrong. But if you suspect your parents have been victimized, you can get help from many sources, including the National Elder Fraud Hotline, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice. You can call (833) 372-8311 to be connected with case managers who will assist you and direct you to additional resources.

1) Federal Trade Commission, 2022

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This is a resource that will answer your most important financial question, namely:

- If employed – When can I retire?
- If not employed – Can I stay retired?

Contour Financial will answer this question, suggest alternative scenarios, if needed, and implement investment strategies in order to reach your objectives.

Customized strategies are developed and implemented. Personalized service is provided by Certified Financial Planners (CFP) and/or Certified Public Accountants (CPA) to clients. Investment, retirement, tax planning & preparation, estate, insurance, cash flow and education planning are all integral parts to the process.

Contour Financial is a private wealth management business located in Orland Park, Illinois. We work primarily with middle income and wealthy clients. As a long-term National Association of Personal Financial Advisors (NAPFA) fee-only firm, all compensation is fully disclosed. For clients seeking investment management by our firm, assets are held at Charles Schwab Institutional, an industry leader.