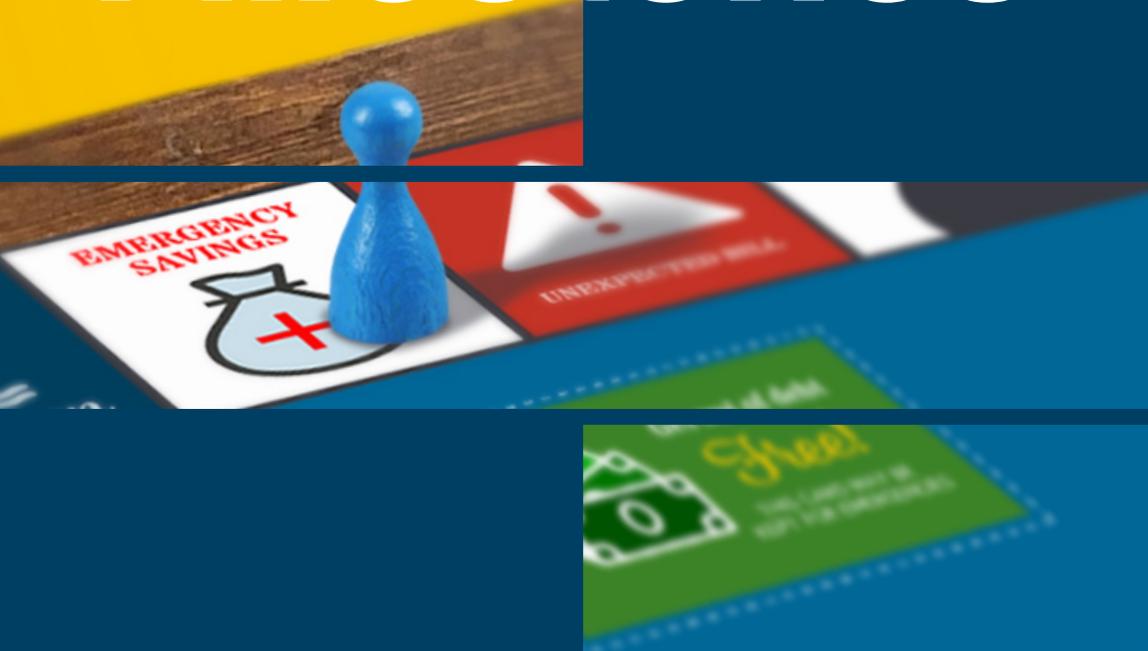


Meeting **Financial Milestones**



Understanding the Key Steps
on the Financial Journey



Meeting Financial Milestones:

Understanding the Key Steps on the Financial Journey

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Introduction

No matter your age, [good money management](#) never goes out of style. And one big part of that is knowing how to save.

Depending on where you are in life, you might be saving for a house, a car, a vacation or retirement—or all of the above and more. And you probably have a lot going on that prevents you from putting aside as much as you'd like.

The good news is, there's always room for improvement when it comes to saving. The first step? Understanding how you're doing when it comes to major savings milestones.

This book is a guide to help you assess where you are on your savings journey, learn new tricks and track your progress. We'll share smart tips on how to save and ideas on how to reach your financial goals. Because at Synchrony, we believe that everyone deserves to feel good about their money. With the right strategies, financial freedom is a target you can reach.

Why are savings milestones important?

“Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”
– Ferris Bueller

Life is busy these days, and it's easy to put things off that don't feel urgent. So you're not alone if you think you can deal with saving money "later," after the higher-priority items on your list are dealt with.

The trouble is, a daily "to-do" list will never be done. Dinners need to be made, cars need to be washed, kids need help with their homework and family members need rides to the doctor—and none of that is going away. Weeks, months and years can fly by before you remember to check if you're taking advantage of that 401(k) savings plan at your new job.

This is where financial milestones can help. Savings milestones in particular are a useful gauge of your financial wellness. Knowing where you might want to be money-wise at various stages of life can be a helpful prompt to focus on your finances. No matter what age or stage you're at, now is a good time to take stock, see where you are and reset your goals.

Are you where you want to be heading to your financial future?

Your financial future is YOUR financial future. It depends not just on where you're coming from, but on where you want to be.

That means that while these milestones are useful guideposts, they aren't definitive directives. Your life situation is unique, and only you can know which financial goals are best for you.

The most important step—if you aren't there already—is learning healthy savings habits so you can **take control of your financial future**. As you develop and refine that skill, you can use these milestones to gauge your progress and choose which ones you want to reach next.

Learning how to budget and save is like unlocking a whole new viewpoint on life. It's a skill that you'll find useful throughout your whole life—one that opens up new possibilities for your future.

Financial freedom can be yours

Think of this e-book as a guidebook, not a trip itinerary. It's packed with useful ideas, tips and tricks, but the choice of which ones to start with and where you'll end up is yours. It's also a book you can return to again and again as your financial and life situation changes.

No matter your age or where you are in life, you'll find these savings milestones relevant and useful as part of the bigger picture of how you live your life—and pay for it, too.

Read more: [Why You Should Save Money at Any Age & Tips to Get Started](#)



What's a financial milestone, anyway? If you want to get old-fashioned about it, you could think of it as the steps you go through in life: Finish school. Get a job. Get married. Buy a house. Have kids. Raise those kids, then retire.

But times aren't what they used to be—things are a lot more flexible. You might skip some of those steps, repeat some of them, or do them in a completely different order. If you think of life as a board game, it's no longer about getting from start to finish along a predetermined line. Nowadays, you can skip around the board at will.

That said, there are certain things that happen in life that are kind of a big deal, money-wise. You might be skipping around the board, but you're still going to land on most (if not all) of those key squares, and it pays to be ready.

Did you know?

The personal saving rate in January 2025 was 4.6%.

For goals like retirement, experts recommend saving 10% to 15% of your income annually.

Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis^a and NerdWallet^b

Creating a savings plan

Before we dig into the specific milestones, let's review the saving and budgeting techniques you'll need.

First, identify your goals. Think about where you'd like to be in the short, medium and long term. For example, do you have credit card or student loan debt you want to pay off? Is there a big vacation you'd like to save up for? Do you want to finally build up an emergency fund, or start putting aside money for retirement? The milestones we identify in upcoming chapters will help you define these targets.

Remember, a plan like this is highly useful, but it's not set in stone. It's OK to create a plan, work with it for a while and then adjust as you make progress and your priorities shift throughout life. In fact, it's probably the best way to do things.

One more thing: As you adjust your budget and spending to meet your savings goals and secure a sound financial future, you might be tempted by finance trends (think affiliate marketing and participating in surveys) and get-rich-quick schemes.

It's OK to be open to fresh ideas, but don't let shiny new things distract you from your goals and from the basics of healthy personal finances: Spend less than you earn and save for the future. Be sure to do research and follow a path that best fits your lifestyle and needs.

Did you know?

As of January 2025, 13% of Americans have no emergency savings.

Source: Bankrate®

Yes, you need a budget

But don't worry—it doesn't have to be complicated.

No shade to people who track every penny in a custom-built spreadsheet—we love you guys!—but that's not the only way to [manage a budget](#). Whether you're high-tech or big into paper, a details person or strictly big picture, there are [budgeting options](#) that will work for you.

The most important thing is to understand how much money is coming in and how much is going out—and where that money is going. Then, you can adjust that to fit your priorities for savings and for life.

When you have a clear idea of both your goals and your financial situation, that's where the magic happens. You're ready to adjust that budget (and your spending) to help you reach your goals faster. For instance: Are you trying to buy a house? (Check out Milestone 3) If you want to hit your down payment goal bad enough, that's the motivation that will help you cut back on expensive concert tickets or restaurant meals to free up room in your budget for more savings.

Automated savings

Hot tip: If one thing stopping you from saving is just getting around to it, an [automated savings plan](#) might be your new BFF. How does it work? It's the "set it and forget it" principle.

Let's say you plan to put \$250 from every paycheck into your emergency fund. One smart strategy is to set things up so your bank automatically withdraws the \$250 from your primary account right after payday and moves it into your savings account. Easy!

Side note: This is a "savings first" [budgeting trick](#). By putting money aside for savings first, you can pretend it doesn't exist. You cover your day-to-day living costs with what's left.

Check out our helpful article: [Unleash Your Savings Potential: Automatic Savings Plans](#)



How are you doing financially?

One thing about milestones is that they make you think you're on the way somewhere. And, sure, you are. But then you start thinking about how far other people you know have gotten. Yes, we're talking about keeping up with the Joneses.

In each chapter, we share some data on how other Americans of different ages relate to each milestone. But it's strictly for informational purposes, not to make you think you're way ahead or way behind.

As we said before, everyone's path through life is different, and the truth is, we all started at different points on that game board. (Eccentric great-aunt left you money? Skip five spaces!) What's most important is that you know where you want to be, and why, and when. And then create a plan to get there. Simple.

Read more: [5 Tips to Achieve Your Financial and Career Goals](#)





Milestone 1:

Creating an emergency fund and financial cushion

Life isn't predictable, and your financial situation isn't either. You might spend months or years humming along just fine spending your entire paycheck, until one day: Oops, an unexpected expense comes up that you don't have the cash to cover.

That's where emergency funds and financial cushions come in. This is the buffer money that helps you weather storms without having to go into debt, and having them in place before you need them will help set you up for all the other savings milestones in your future.

Once you've got your financial cushion and emergency fund in place, you'll be able to breathe a little easier knowing you're prepared. Less money stress? Sounds fantastic to us.

What is a financial cushion?

A [financial cushion](#) is the buffer money in your daily banking account. It's the extra cash on hand that prevents you from accidentally going into overdraft or helps cover the extra gap between paychecks when you get a new job. How big it should be depends on your personal financial situation, but between \$100 and \$1,000 is a good place to start.

What is an emergency fund?

An [emergency fund](#) is a pot of easy-to-access cash that you can use to cover [unexpected expenses](#)—think surprise healthcare costs, or living expenses should you lose your job. (Sorry, Taylor Swift tickets don't count as an emergency.) Usually, it's kept in a separate bank account from the one you use day-to-day. Again, how big it should be depends on your personal financial situation, but many experts suggest an [emergency fund](#) should be able to cover three to six months of expenses.

Where to keep your emergency fund

For longer-term goals like retirement, think about building a diversified, risk-appropriate portfolio that invests in things like stocks and bonds. But for shorter-term goals like emergency funds, lower-risk products that give you reliable returns and easy access to your money are the name of the game, like these options:

- **A money market account** is a basic bank account with benefits: namely, a higher interest rate than you might get from other [account options](#) like checking, but often still with checks and debit cards as spending options.
- **A high yield savings account** is similar but really [intended for saving](#), not for everyday use.
- **A certificate of deposit (CD)** is a good choice for storing a lump sum of cash that you don't need to access right away. [CDs](#) often have higher interest rates than savings accounts, but you usually have to lock your money in for a certain period of time, such as a year.

**Make sure your emergency savings
can save you.**

1 in 3 Americans have more credit card debt
than emergency savings.



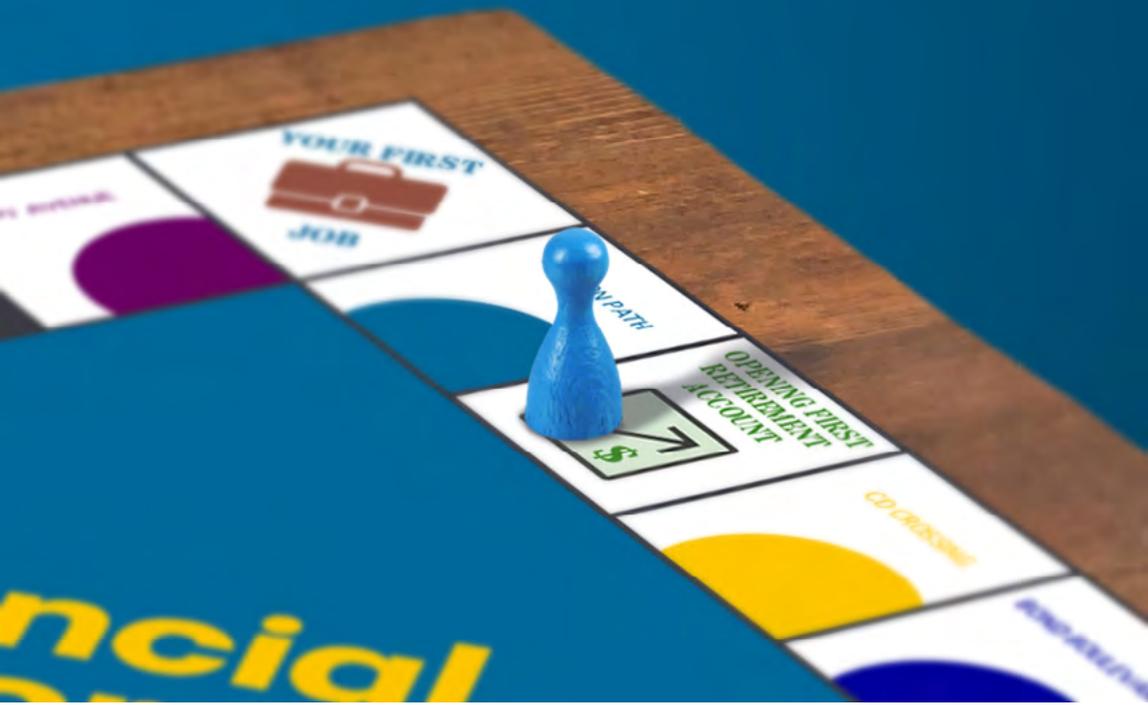
Source: Bankrate®

Tips and tricks to get started

- The first step is to set your goal. How much money do you want to put aside? What is your timeline? For instance, if you're aiming to create a financial cushion of \$600 and you want to reach this target in four months, that means finding \$150 per month to save.
- Next, look at your monthly budget and figure out how much you can allocate to this goal. If you're short, don't worry—there are ways to boost your income to compensate. For instance, you might get a temporary side gig to bring in some extra cash, or finally clean out that overstuffed closet and sell those perfectly good but no-longer-your-style clothes.
- Then, set up a separate bank account for your savings—ideally one that earns a good amount of interest, like those we listed above. Consider setting up an automated savings plan so money gets transferred there regularly, or set yourself reminders to move money in manually.
- Finally, track your progress. Checking in with your goal can be super motivating. And when you've hit your target, congratulations! You're ready to set a new savings goal.

Read more: [Emergency Funds: Why You Need One and How Much to Save](#)





Milestone 2:

Opening your first 401(k)/retirement account

The thing about saving is, the earlier you start, the more time your money has to grow. So even if retirement is many decades away for you, there are huge benefits to opening an account and starting to add to it.

And if retirement is not quite so many decades away? Don't stress if you haven't gotten started yet. That just means you should be even more motivated to get going. Here's what you need to know.

Workplace retirement plans

If you have a full-time job or are planning to get one, keep retirement planning top of mind. Many employers offer retirement savings plans—they might be called a 401(k) or a 403(b)—that can be an excellent addition to your financial portfolio.

What are the benefits? First, there's the "pay-yourself-first" principle: Contributions are automatically deducted from your paycheck, so you don't even have to think about it. Second, your employer might put money in the pot, too: This is called matching contributions. Free money? Sign us up!

What kinds of retirement accounts do people own?

18.2% have IRA or Keogh accounts

34.6% have 401(k), 403(b), 503(b) or Thrift Savings Plans

13.5% have defined-benefit or cash balance plans

Source: U.S. Census Bureau^d

Tax now or tax later?

Now that you're getting serious about saving for retirement, it's time to make sure you understand all the options. One key concept is tax deferral.

Your traditional [IRA](#) or 401(k) plan, for instance, typically uses pre-tax income. For example, let's say you earn \$70,000 per year, and this year, you're depositing \$5,000 into your IRA account. That means you'll pay income tax on just \$65,000. The catch? You'll have to pay income tax when you withdraw the money.

There's another option, called a Roth IRA. This one works in reverse: You deposit after-tax income, but you don't have to pay any income tax when you're retired and start withdrawals.

Roth? Traditional? Both? Your 30s is a good time to understand the differences and which is best for you right now.

Tax-advantaged accounts



Tax-deferred. Taxes on income and any growth that occurs are deferred to a later date, usually when the income is withdrawn from the account.



Tax-exempt. Contributions to the account are made with after-tax dollars. Since you already paid taxes, the principal and any additional growth are not taxed when withdrawn from the account.

Investigate investments

To get the most out of your savings, you want them to be making money for you. And the best way to do that over the long term is by [investing](#). But where should you put your money? That's where an investment portfolio comes in.

Your portfolio is your selection of investments. At the top level, it might mean, for example, allocating 30% of your money to bonds and 70% to stocks. Then, it's a question of which [stocks and bonds](#). This is an individual decision that depends on your financial situation and goals, as well as personal preferences. It takes a bit of research, and hiring an expert can help.

Find a financial planner

Who should that expert be? One option is a fee-based [financial planner](#). Unlike investment advisors who work for specific banks or other institutions and offer you their services for "free," fee-based planners earn a living from their clients, so they aren't beholden to any particular products.

Some people hire a planner to manage their entire portfolio, but that isn't the only option. You might hire a planner to give you guidance and a specific individualized plan that you can follow by DIY-ing your investing, or simply to answer your general questions and get you on the right path to a portfolio you'll be happy with.

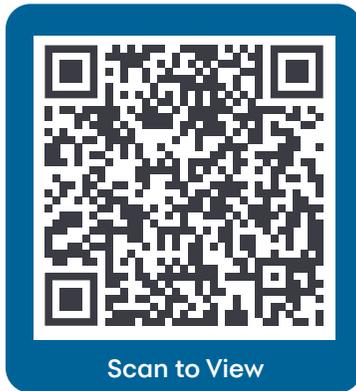
Why the term “fiduciary” can matter when picking a financial advisor

When it comes to financial advice, a “fiduciary” describes a financial professional who is legally obligated to act in the best interest of their client. A nonfiduciary advisor or broker only has to provide “suitable” advice or products, which, in some cases, allows the choice to greatly benefit the advisor.

Tips and tricks to get started

- First, if you have a job, check to see what retirement savings programs are available to you. If you like what you see, then head in that direction: Find out from HR how to sign up and start contributing.
- If you're self-employed or your workplace doesn't offer a retirement savings plan, you'll need to DIY. Look into self-directed [IRA offerings](#) from your bank or an investment firm.
- Then, figure out how much you want to contribute. That number will depend on your age, your income and your overall goals.
- Finally, set up your contributions. Automatic is ideal, even if it's just a small amount like \$25 or \$50 per paycheck. It all adds up!

Read more: [Kickstart Your Financial Game: Why Your 20s are Gold for Starting a 401\(k\)](#)





Milestone 3:

Buying a condo or house

Everyone needs somewhere to live, and while renting is a great option for many people, there's something that just feels right about owning your own home. Whether it's your first house, your forever home or your dream retirement property, this milestone is one that will likely come up several times in your life. Here are some things to think about.

Did you know?

The U.S. homeownership rate in 2022 was even higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic—65.8% compared to 64.6% in 2019—a rebound driven largely by those age 44 and younger.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau®

It starts with saving

If you're not yet in the market, then your first step is saving for a [down payment on a home](#). This takes the same savings strategies we've discussed in previous chapters: You'll be helped along by having a good budget and an automated savings system in place.

How much do you need to save? That depends on where you live, the kind of home you want to buy and the amount of mortgage you want (or can qualify for). The standard [down payment](#) has historically been 20% of the purchase price: That would be \$70,000 on a purchase price of \$350,000, for example. (Though don't forget you'll need cash for closing costs, too.) But many people put down less than that and purchase insurance to compensate. There are a lot of [pros and cons](#) to think about.

Daunted by saving that much money? Don't be—you just need a good plan. Sit down with your budget and come up with some strategies to put more of your income toward your house fund. Remember that there's huge value in paying off any high-interest debt as quickly as possible. And think of ways to bring in more money, such as getting a roommate, downsizing to a cheaper rental or earning extra via a side gig.

Types of home loans available

Conventional

- Majority of loans
- Typically cost less than FHA loans but can be harder to get

Government-backed

- FHA: Low down payment; available to those with lower credit scores
- VA: For veterans, service members and surviving spouses
- USDA: For low- to middle-income borrowers in rural areas

Special programs

- State or local housing agencies: Can be available to low- to middle-income borrowers, first-time homebuyers and public service employees
- Special purpose credit programs: Loans from private lenders to low- to middle-income borrowers in targeted communities

The type of loan you choose can affect how much you need for a down payment, the total cost of your loan and how much you can borrow.

Source: Consumer Financial Protection Bureau^f

Your credit rating matters

What's your [credit score](#)? If you don't know, it's worth checking in on. Having [a good credit score](#) can help you qualify to borrow more money at a lower interest rate—something that's pretty important when you want to take out a mortgage.

One factor that impacts your credit score is [your credit cards](#) and how you use them. Responsible use of credit cards can help raise your credit score—it's one of the [many benefits](#) of using them—but if you slip up on your good credit card habits, it can actually hurt your score. Make sure to always pay your bills on time, use only a small portion of your credit limit and use older cards for longer rather than constantly applying for new ones.

Set your housing budget

Whether it's your first home or your fifth, if you're in the market for a new house, you need to make a budget. Assess how much money you have available for a down payment and monthly carrying costs, and look at the prices for condos and houses in your market. If your budget is tight, consider homes that come with secondary units as [mortgage](#) helpers.

When calculating your potential expenses, remember that houses and properties that are bigger and more expensive tend to come with bigger and more expensive maintenance and repairs, too. Need to replace the plumbing or electrical, or redo the floors? It's going to cost more in a bigger house. The same goes for property tax, utility bills and even hiring someone to clean.

Start with a detailed analysis of your financial situation and goals, and decide whether this kind of purchase will get you closer to where you want to be.

Housing expenses that might surprise you and your budget



- **New furnishings:** That empty room feels like it's begging for a table or couch.



- **Ongoing property taxes:** These can add up to thousands a year.



- **HOA fees:** Along with monthly fees, homeowners associations can charge assessments for additional upgrades or repairs to the common areas.



- **Home repairs:** Broken dishwasher. New roof. Make sure you're prepared.



- **Discovery of issues:** Bugs, water damage, leaky windows and other post-inspection surprises can be costly.

Tips and tricks to get started

- First, research the housing market in your area. What kind of home would you like to live in, and what would it cost? Could you save money by choosing a different neighborhood?
- Then, think about your appetite for renovations. Are you a DIY pro who loves the idea of a fixer-upper? Will you have the budget to hire construction help? Or are you all thumbs and prefer to buy a house you can live in immediately with minimal effort?

- Once you've got a rough housing budget in mind, assess your finances and budget and decide what it will take to get together a down payment.
- Finally, start saving! Come up with a plan to reach your down payment goal and work toward it.

Read more: [Pros and Cons of Putting 20% Down on Your Mortgage](#)





Milestone 4:

Paying off student loans and other debt

Debt is a fact of life. From credit cards to student loans and mortgages, borrowing money can help you reach your goals faster, improve your credit score and organize your finances to suit your lifestyle.

But sometimes, you can have too much of a good thing. When debt gets out of hand, it can be a drain on your finances and set you back on your goals. And if there's one thing that gives a person a sense of financial freedom, it's being [debt-free](#). The more you're paying lenders in interest, the less you have available to cover other expenses.

Ready to pay off a loan on your list and [get out of debt](#)? Here are some things to consider.

Student loan debt

The average student loan balance in 2024 was **\$35,208.**

Source: Experian⁹

Assess the situation

To get out of debt, you first have to understand the debt you're responsible for. Start a list (maybe a spreadsheet) and gather the following information for all the money you owe:

- Total owing
- Type of loan (credit card, student loan, car loan, mortgage, etc.)
- Interest rate
- Minimum monthly payment

This isn't essential for budgeting, but for the sake of motivation, it can also be helpful—and eye-opening—to know how much interest you're paying each month. Think of what else you could do with that money should you pay that debt off!

Come up with a plan

A good guideline to follow is to pay off the highest interest debt first. Often, that's credit cards—or, if you're carrying a balance on more than one card, the highest interest of the bunch. This is called the debt avalanche method, and you can't argue with the math on it. All things being equal, it makes logical sense.

However, you're a human being, not a robot. Emotions matter too. That's where the debt snowball method comes in. The idea is that you pay off the smallest debt first, even if it doesn't have the highest interest rate. Paying off a credit card completely feels good, and will help keep you motivated to move on to the next one. Kind of like a snowball rolling down a hill, getting bigger as it goes.

There's a third option you can combine with these, and that's debt consolidation. By bundling some of your debt together and getting a single loan instead, you can simplify your efforts and lower your overall interest rate.

This is where the old saying “Know thyself” comes in. Imagine each of these scenarios and how they would work for you. Which are you most likely to stick to? Which will help motivate you?

Budget, budget, budget

The next step is to find room in your budget to make bigger debt repayments. Look at your monthly income and expenditures, and strategize ways to rearrange things. Imagine how good it will feel to pay off your debt, then think of a best-case scenario of how you could spend a bit less or earn a bit more to get there faster.

At the same time, it's important not to add more debt. Do you have a financial cushion and emergency fund? (See Milestone 1) If not, it's worth setting up even a small one to help buffer for unexpected expenses as you pay off your debt. And if shopping for fun is too tempting, brainstorm ways to avoid it, like leaving your credit cards at home or unsubscribing from emails from your favorite stores.

And remember that consistency is key. Getting out of debt is probably not going to happen overnight—especially when it comes to larger loans like student loans and mortgages. So it's important to have a realistic plan in place that you'll be able to stick to for the long haul.

Tips and tricks to get started

- Make things easier by creating habits and automating what you can. Set up payments to come straight out of your bank account, and create rules for yourself on how much of any extra money you get—like tips, bonuses and gifts—will go onto your debt. (All of it, ideally, but another ratio like 75% would be understandable too.)
- Don't rely on willpower—it never lasts for long. Have a plan and stick to it.
- Accept that you might have to make sacrifices for a while. But remind yourself it will be worth it in the end.
- Once you've made a plan, check in with it regularly. Track how much you've paid off, and celebrate it! (Just not by spending lots of money.)

Read more: [Want to Be Debt-Free? Start with this Checklist](#)





Milestone 5:

Preparing for retirement

No matter your age and stage in life, it's important to think about retirement. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, life flies by way faster than you think it will. And second, there are huge financial benefits to starting your retirement savings earlier.

Whether you're just starting out with your retirement plan contributions (see Milestone 2) or getting close to entering your golden years, you've got a lot of planning to do. Here are some points to ponder.

What is the median retirement savings by age?

In this chart, “median” represents the middle point of savings between Americans saving on the highest level and those saving at the lowest level.

Age range	Median retirement savings
Under age 25	\$2,816
Ages 25-34	\$14,933
Ages 35-44	\$35,537
Ages 45-54	\$60,763
Ages 55-64	\$87,571
Ages 65+	\$88,488

Source: Vanguard 2024¹

Get ambitious with FIRE

Do the words "financial independence, retire early" give you the shivers—in a good way? You might want to explore this movement, in which devotees take advantage of the value of saving early by kick-starting their portfolios at a young age and then reaping the benefits.

This lifestyle isn't for everybody—[FIRE](#) adherents save up and invest 25 times their annual spending, which doesn't leave much room for nice-to-haves—but it could be the financial dream that fires up your motivation to save. (See what we did there?)

The rule of 25: A way to measure if you can retire

Multiply your annual living expenses by 25 to estimate how much money—including savings and other retirement income, such as Social Security—you need to retire.

For example:
\$40,000 a year in living expenses x 25
= \$1,000,000 required

Source: Bankrate¹

Get stock savvy

You might own stocks already, either directly or via mutual funds or exchange-traded funds (ETFs), but do you understand how the market works and are you happy with your investing portfolio? Learning more about the [stock market](#) and how you can best buy in is an important step toward a financial future you'll be happy with.

Review your retirement plan

When do you want to retire, and [what will it look like?](#) [Can you afford](#) your dream retirement? Or, at the very least, your extremely sufficient retirement?

Retirement Savings Guidelines

Fidelity Investment suggests workers should:

Save the equivalent of	By age
1X their annual salary	35
2X their annual salary	40
4X their annual salary	50
5X their annual salary	55
8X their annual salary	67

The graph above shows how much money experts say you should have saved for retirement, depending on your age. Of course, there are a lot of other factors, like if you own property or have access to a pension, but they're good figures to start with. If you're there: Congratulations! If not: Good news! You've still got time to play catch-up.

The 4% rule: How to spend money safely in retirement

The 4% rule is a guideline for retirement savings. It suggests withdrawing 4% of your savings in the first year of retirement and adjusting for inflation each year after to make your money last about 30 years, assuming a balanced investment portfolio. However, this rule is just a guideline and may not be suitable for everyone, as individual circumstances, market conditions and investment strategies vary.

Source: Bankrate!

Check in with your budget

As your life situation evolves, your budget should too. The numbers that worked well for you a decade ago might not be relevant now. Keeping in mind your retirement goals and debt situation, [rework your budget](#) accordingly. Finding a little [extra cash](#) to pay off debt or pop into your investment portfolio now could mean a much better financial situation later.

Optimize Social Security

You can start receiving Social Security benefits at age 62, but that doesn't mean you should. There's a major disadvantage to starting early: Your payments will be [permanently lower](#). In fact, the longer you wait (up to age 70), the more you'll receive every month.

This isn't to discourage you from starting at 62, 65 or 68, if you need the money. It might even work out better for you—even though the payments are reduced, you get more of them overall.

You can do a quick calculation for your break-even point. For example, let's say you expect a monthly benefit of \$1,000 if you start payments at

retirement age, which is 67 for anyone born in 1960 or later. If you were to begin at 62 instead, you'd receive \$700 per month or \$8,400 per year. By starting at age 62, you'll already have received \$42,000 by the time you turn 67. At a difference of \$300 per month, it will take 140 months—11 years and 8 months—to break even (aka not long before your 79th birthday).

When considering the [best age to start your benefits](#), think about your life expectancy, your available earnings, your health needs and your family situation. And don't worry about what everyone else is doing—this is a personal decision.

Did you know?

Your Social Security benefit can increase based on cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). In 2024, the COLA increase was 2.5%.

Source: Social Security Administration*

In January 2025, the average Social Security benefit was \$1,976 per month.

Source: Social Security Administration¹

Tips and tricks to get started

- Keep taxes in mind when budgeting for your post-earning years. They can make all the difference in your financial plan.
- Estimate what your retirement living costs might look like. The common wisdom is that retirees need less money than people who are working, but that might not be true if you have big, expensive plans for how you want to fill your time. And think hard about your priorities: If travel is going to be your number one, perhaps you could downsize your home to compensate.
- Don't forget about planning for healthcare. Insurance and medication costs can add up, and there might be other expenses you'll find necessary, like nail care or massages.
- Remember the power of compound interest. The earlier you build up your retirement nest egg, the longer it will have to grow on its own.

Read more: [6 Important Costs to Consider When Planning for Retirement](#)



Conclusion

If a penny saved is a penny earned, then by taking control of your savings, you'll be boosting your earnings for years to come.

No matter your age or the milestones you're aiming for, we hope you've gotten some useful tips from this e-book, and that it's set you on the road to the financial future you've always dreamed of.

Remember, there's no right order when it comes to hitting these milestones. You're a unique individual, and your financial situation is unique too. But they're a useful guide to help you set realistic goals, and then set some more.

And if there's one thing we hope you take away, it's that there are huge advantages to saving early. Getting ahead when you're young is easier than catching up later, and that's true at any age. Good money management and savings habits will pay dividends later on, both figuratively and literally.

That said, don't fret about times gone by. There's an old saying: The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago, and the second-best time is right now. The same goes for saving. Even if you're hitting these savings milestones later in life, you're still hitting them, and that's what matters.

To get started, why not [open a Synchrony account](#) today? Our money market, high yield savings and CD accounts are [insured](#), have no minimum balance and offer competitive interest rates to help your money make money right away.

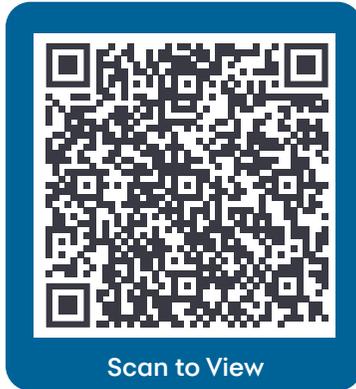
Happy saving!

Resources

Federal student loan debt relief

Useful information on the state of student loan forgiveness.

<https://studentaid.gov/manage-loans/forgiveness-cancellation>



How to buy a home

Information from the Department of Housing and Urban Development that first-time homebuyers may find useful.

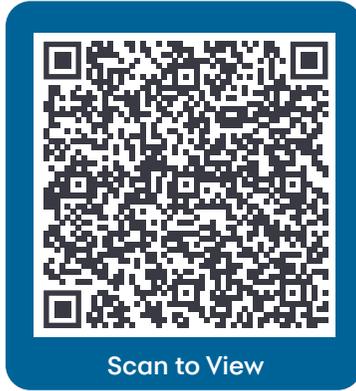
https://www.hud.gov/topics/buying_a_home



Early retirement calculator

See how your savings rate can influence the time it takes to financially retire.

<https://networthify.com/calculator/>



Sources

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About the Author

Kat Tancock is an award-winning writer, editor, translator and content strategist based in British Columbia. She is co-founder and co-editor of nature-focused Rewilding Magazine as well as Workshop, a small business magazine for makers and creators in Canada.

Kat's work history includes editorial jobs at Reader's Digest, Food & Drink and Canadian Living; she has also taught Russian at the University of Toronto and managed a computer lab at the University of Victoria. She co-founded Toronto content marketing agency Tavanberg, which has strategized and created content for brands including American Express and United Way, and has written on travel, food, business, health and environmental topics for publications including Chatelaine, The Globe and Mail, Canadian Business, MoneySense and the San Francisco Chronicle.

Life is a financial journey: Make sure you're moving in the right direction.

Inside you'll find an essential guide to major milestones and moments you may face over the course of your financial life. You'll also get tips and perspective on how to take control of your money at every stage.

Learn how to make your path as rewarding as possible, and plan for a future that offers you peace of mind.

Some highlights:

- Creating a personal budget
- Building an emergency fund
- Tackling student loans
- Finding a financial advisor
- Becoming a homeowner