

# Beyond the Basics

## Customized Wealth Strategies



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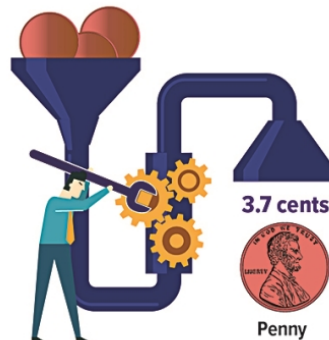
**60%**

Share of actively circulating coins that sit in coin jars.

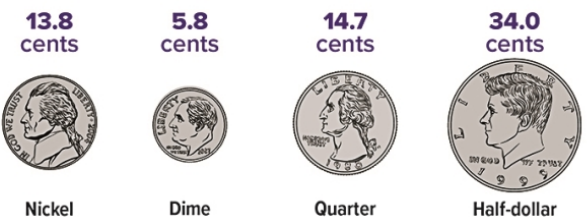
Source: U.S. Federal Reserve, October 2023

## The U.S. Penny Is History

After more than 200 years, the U.S. government is discontinuing one-cent pennies, primarily because it costs much more to mint them than they are worth. In addition, paying with cash has become much less common. The U.S. Treasury ordered the last blanks — metal pieces from which coins are struck — in May 2025 and rolled out the last pennies in November. Pennies could remain in circulation for some time, but eventually, cash transactions will need to be rounded up or down to the nearest nickel. Once made from pure copper, the penny is now composed of copper-plated zinc.



### Cost to produce and distribute one coin in 2024



Sources: *The Wall Street Journal*, May 22, 2025, and November 12, 2025; U.S. Mint, 2024 (Cost amounts rounded to the nearest tenth.)

# No More Groundhog Day for Your Finances: Time for a Financial Wellness Checkup

Just like Groundhog Day, our financial habits can repeat themselves, month after month and year after year. That is, until we consciously break the pattern. Now is a good time to check on your finances, since it's still early enough in the year to make meaningful changes. A financial wellness checkup can help you identify patterns that keep you stuck with bad habits and open the door to new behaviors that move you closer to financial stability.

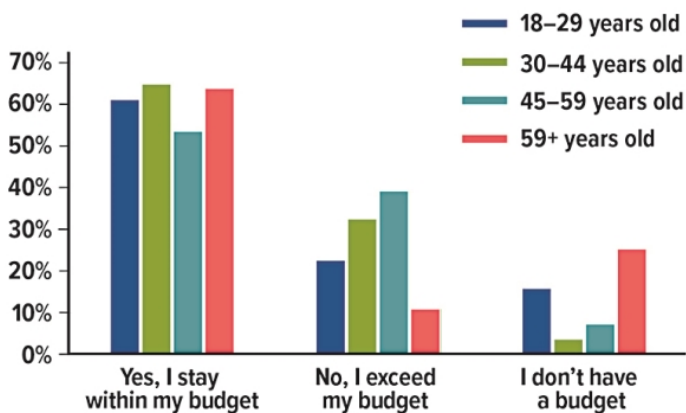
## Review your spending and budget

Start out by reviewing your spending over the last month by checking your bank, credit card, and payment app statements. Next, identify what money is coming in, whether earned income or from other sources, such as investments. Add them up and compare the two totals to make sure you are spending within your means. If your expenses outweigh your income, you'll likely need to make some adjustments, such as reducing your discretionary spending.

While it's normal to stray from your budget occasionally, there are some ways to help make working within it a bit easier:

- Make budgeting a part of your daily routine.
- Build occasional rewards into your budget.
- Evaluate your budget regularly and make changes if necessary.
- Use budgeting software/apps to track your progress.

## Staying On Budget, by Age Group



Source: WalletHub, September 12, 2025

## Set new financial goals and reprioritize existing ones

Next, take a look at the financial goals you set for yourself — both short- and long-term. Perhaps you wanted to increase your cash reserve or save money for a down payment on a home. Maybe you wanted to invest more money towards your retirement. Did you accomplish any of your goals? Do you have any new goals that you would like to target?

Finally, have your personal or financial circumstances changed during the past year (e.g., marriage, the birth of a child, or a job promotion)? Would that warrant a reprioritization of goals?

## Make sure your investment portfolio is still on target

Review your investment portfolio to ensure that it is still on target to help you pursue your financial goals. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I still have the same time horizon for investing as I did last year?
- Has my tolerance for risk changed?
- Do I have an increased need for liquidity?
- Does any investment now represent too large (or too small) a part of my portfolio?\*

## Focus on reducing your debt

An essential part of any financial wellness checkup focuses on reducing debt. Here are some tips to help you keep your debt in check:

- Keep track of all of your credit card balances and be aware of interest rates and hidden fees.
- Develop a plan to manage your payments and strive to avoid late fees.
- Optimize your repayments by paying off high-interest debt first or consider taking advantage of debt consolidation/refinancing programs.
- Avoid charging more than you can pay off at the end of each billing cycle.

## Take steps to improve your credit health

Having healthy credit is another important part of financial wellness. Check your credit report, which contains information about your past and present credit transactions and is used by potential lenders to evaluate your creditworthiness. A positive credit history helps you obtain credit when you need it and possibly at a lower interest rate.

Review your credit report for inaccuracies. To establish a good track record with creditors, always pay your monthly bills on time and try to limit credit inquiries on your credit report. You are entitled to a free copy of your credit report every 12 months from each credit reporting company. Visit [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) for more information.

*\*Rebalancing involves selling some investments in order to buy others. Selling investments in a taxable account could result in a tax liability.*

*All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful.*

# Key Retirement and Tax Numbers for 2026

Every year, the Internal Revenue Service announces cost-of-living adjustments that affect contribution limits for retirement plans and various tax deduction, exclusion, exemption, and threshold amounts. Here are some of the key adjustments for 2026.

## Estate, gift, and generation-skipping transfer tax

- The annual gift tax exclusion (and annual generation-skipping transfer tax exclusion) for 2026 is \$19,000, unchanged from 2025.
- The gift and estate tax basic exclusion amount (and generation-skipping transfer tax exemption) for 2026 is \$15,000,000, up from \$13,990,000 in 2025.

## Standard deduction

A taxpayer can generally choose to itemize certain deductions or claim a standard deduction on the federal income tax return. In 2026, the standard deduction is:

- \$16,100 (up from \$15,750 in 2025) for single filers or married individuals filing separate returns
- \$32,200 (up from \$31,500 in 2025) for married joint filers
- \$24,150 (up from \$23,625 in 2025) for heads of households

The additional standard deduction amount for the blind and those age 65 or older in 2026 is:

- \$2,050 (up from \$2,000 in 2025) for single filers and heads of households
- \$1,650 (up from \$1,600 in 2025) for all other filing statuses

Special rules apply for an individual who can be claimed as a dependent by another taxpayer.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law in July 2025, introduced a new senior deduction of \$6,000 for taxpayers filing individually who are age 65 or older for tax year 2026. A deduction of up to \$12,000 may be claimed by married couples filing jointly if they are both age 65 or older. This deduction is stacked on top of the standard deduction and additional deduction for the blind and those age 65 or older or on top of itemized deductions.

## IRAs

The combined annual limit on contributions to traditional and Roth IRAs is \$7,500 in 2026 (up from \$7,000 in 2025), with individuals age 50 or older able to contribute an additional \$1,100 in 2026 (up from \$1,000 in 2025). The limit on contributions to a Roth IRA phases out for certain modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) ranges (see table). For individuals who are active participants in an employer-sponsored retirement plan, the deduction for contributions to a traditional IRA also phases out for certain MAGI

ranges (see table). The limit on nondeductible contributions to a traditional IRA is not subject to phaseout based on MAGI.

### MAGI Ranges: Contributions to a Roth IRA

	2025	2026
Single/Head of household	\$150,000–\$165,000	\$153,000–\$168,000
Married filing jointly	\$236,000–\$246,000	\$242,000–\$252,000
Married filing separately	\$0–\$10,000	\$0–\$10,000

### MAGI Ranges: Deductible Contributions to a Traditional IRA

	2025	2026
Single/Head of household	\$79,000–\$89,000	\$81,000–\$91,000
Married filing jointly	\$126,000–\$146,000	\$129,000–\$149,000

*Note: The 2026 phaseout range is \$242,000–\$252,000 (up from \$236,000–\$246,000 in 2025) when the individual making the IRA contribution is not covered by a workplace retirement plan but is filing jointly with a spouse who is covered. The phaseout range is \$0–\$10,000 when the individual is married filing separately and either spouse is covered by a workplace plan.*

## Employer-sponsored retirement plans

- Employees who participate in 401(k), 403(b), and most 457 plans can defer up to \$24,500 in compensation in 2026 (up from \$23,500 in 2025); employees age 50 or older can defer up to an additional \$8,000 in 2026 (up from \$7,500 in 2025). For employees ages 60 to 63, the additional deferral limit is \$11,250 for 2026 (unchanged from 2025).
- Employees participating in a SIMPLE retirement plan can defer up to \$17,000 in 2026 (up from \$16,500 in 2025), and employees age 50 or older can defer up to an additional \$4,000 in 2026 (up from \$3,500 in 2025), with an increase to \$5,250 in 2026 (unchanged from 2025) for ages 60 to 63.

## Kiddie tax: child's unearned income

Under the kiddie tax, a child's unearned income above \$2,700 in 2026 (unchanged from 2025) is taxed using the parents' tax rates.

# A Roadmap for Your Family

A will is an essential legal document that describes how your estate should be distributed upon your death. It is the basis for the probate process and can serve as a guide for your heirs.

A letter of instruction has no formal legal status, but it could be just as important as a will in helping your loved ones settle your estate and move forward with their lives. Think of it as a roadmap for your family, providing information about the steps they should take during a difficult time.

Unlike a will, which must follow legal guidelines and may require an attorney, a letter of instruction can be written by you in any way you choose. Here are some topics you may want to address.

**Financial accounts and account numbers**, including online usernames and passwords. If you prefer not to write down login credentials, the executor of your estate should be able to access accounts using the account numbers and your Social Security number.

**List of documents and their locations**, including (but not limited to) your will, insurance policies, tax returns, bank and investment account documents, real estate deeds and mortgage documents, vehicle titles, Social Security and Medicare cards, marriage and/or divorce papers, and birth certificate.

**Contact information** for professionals who handle your financial and legal affairs, such as your attorney,

financial professional, insurance agent, and accountant. Also include others who may be helpful, such as a business partner or trusted friend.



**Bills and creditors**, including when payments are due and other pertinent information, such as loan terms and balances as of the date of the letter.

**Your final wishes** for burial or cremation, a funeral or memorial service, organ donation, and charitable contributions in your memory.

You might also include more personal thoughts or life lessons that you want to pass on, or you could write a separate letter.

Keep your letter of instruction in a safe, yet accessible place and tell your loved ones where it can be found. Be sure the executor of your estate is aware of the letter; it might also be wise to give the executor a copy for safekeeping.

It's important to review your letter of instruction regularly and update it as appropriate. Your heirs will thank you for taking the time to prepare.

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