

# Special Bulletin

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Latest information from The County Federal Credit Union

## How to get your free credit report

All Americans are entitled to a free credit report every year, from each of the three major credit bureaus. The free credit reports, which used to cost as much as \$9.50 each, come as a result of the passage of the 2003 Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act. Thanks to the law, the three major credit reporting agencies, Equifax, TransUnion and Experian, are each required to provide consumers, upon request, a free copy of their credit report once every 12 months from a centralized source. This centralized source includes a Web site, a toll-free telephone number and a postal address.

The reports will not automatically be sent out. Consumers who want their credit reports must initiate the request in one of the following three ways:

- 1. Online:** Go to [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com), which is the only authorized source for consumers to access their annual credit report online for free. Be careful not to make a mistake in the URL -- some opportunistic entrepreneurs have staked out the URLs that are close in spelling, and they'll try to sell you the reports, instead of giving them for free.
- 2. By phone:** Call (877) 322-8228. This may be the choice for those who aren't Internet-savvy.
- 3. By mail:** You may complete the form on the back of the Annual Credit Report Request brochure, and mail it to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA, 30348-5281.

You'll be able to order all three credit reports at one time, or at different times throughout the year. It's your choice. But be sure to order from the centralized agency. If you go directly to the credit reporting agencies, you will be charged unless you fit another criteria for a free report.

The 2003 law did not eliminate the other ways to receive a free credit report. You're still entitled to a free credit report if: you've been denied a loan, insurance policy, or job based on your credit report; you're applying for unemployment or receive public assistance; and you currently reside in one of the seven states that already offer an annual free credit report from each credit reporting agency. Maine is one of those seven states. Colorado, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey and Vermont are the others and Georgia residents are entitled to two free annual credit reports from each credit reporting agency.

### What's the catch?

It seems like this would be an excellent opportunity for the credit reporting agencies to send you through a complicated maze of requests to discourage you from applying for a free report, or to require you to hand over more of your personal information so they can turn around and sell it. But there is no catch. The FTC has required the agencies to make the process simple, uncluttered with advertisements and as minimally intrusive as possible. Also, the agencies are allowed to collect only as much personal identity information as necessary to process your request.

## Free Credit Freezes

Security freezes, also known as credit freezes, restrict access to your credit file, making it harder for identity thieves to open new accounts in your name. Starting September 21, 2018, you can freeze and unfreeze your credit file for free. You also can get a free freeze for your children who are under 16. And if you are someone's guardian, conservator or have a valid power of attorney, you can get a free freeze for that person, too.

### How will these freezes work?

Contact all three of the nationwide credit reporting agencies – Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. If you request a freeze online or by phone, the agency must place the freeze within one business day. If you request a lift of the freeze, the agency must lift it within one hour. If you make your request by mail, the agency must place or lift the freeze within three business days after receiving your request. You also can lift the freeze temporarily without a fee.

### Don't confuse freezes with locks.

They work in a similar way, but locks may have monthly fees. If you want a free freeze guaranteed by federal law, then opt for a freeze, not a lock.

### Year-Long Fraud Alerts

A fraud alert tells businesses that check your credit that they should check with you before opening a new account. Starting September 21, 2018, when you place a fraud alert, it will last one year, instead of 90 days. Fraud alerts will still be free and identity theft victims can still get an extended fraud alert for seven years.



### Credit Freezes and the Military

If you're in the military, you'll still have access to active duty alerts, which let you place a fraud alert for one year, renewable for the time you're deployed. The active duty alert also gives you an added benefit: the credit reporting agencies will take your name off their marketing lists for prescreened credit card offers for two years (unless you ask them to add you back on).

You can place a fraud alert or active duty alert by visiting any one of the three nationwide credit reporting agencies – Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion. The one that you contact must notify the other two. You also can find links to their websites at:

[IdentityTheft.gov/CreditBureauContacts](https://www.identitytheft.gov/CreditBureauContacts)

### Issues with a Credit Freeze

If you think a credit reporting agency is not placing a credit freeze or fraud alert properly, you can submit a complaint online or by calling 855-411-2372. If you think someone stole your identity, visit the FTC's website, [IdentityTheft.gov](https://www.identitytheft.gov), to get a personalized recovery plan that walks you through the steps to take.

For more information, check out Place a Fraud Alert, Extended Fraud Alerts and Credit Freezes, and Credit Freeze FAQs. And if you're considering a child credit freeze, you also may want to read Child Identity Theft; all located at the Federal Trade Commission's website: [consumer.ftc.gov](https://www.consumer.ftc.gov)

#### Credit Bureau Contacts

Contact the national credit bureaus to request fraud alerts, credit freezes (also known as security freezes), and opt outs from pre-screened credit offers.

##### Equifax

[Equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services](https://www.equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services)  
800-685-1111

##### Experian

[Experian.com/help](https://www.experian.com/help)  
888-EXPERIAN (888-397-3742)

##### Transunion

[TransUnion.com/credit-help](https://www.transunion.com/credit-help)  
888-909-8872