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Auto insurance rebates

All major auto insurers are offering their customers lowered rates on their premiums now that there are fewer drivers on the road and fewer claims. Check with your agent to see if your household may qualify for a rebate in the form of a refund or as a credit applicable to future premiums. To learn more, see the *Kiplinger's* article "[Coronavirus Car Insurance Rebates for the Road Less Traveled](#)."

Where's my payment?

Wondering if you've received your one-time relief payment from the government? First, if your bank account direct-deposit information is on file with the IRS as part of your 2019 return, you should be all set, so check your bank account or statement. Payments started going out to banks on April 13. If you'd like to check the status of your payment with the IRS and/or add your bank account information to speed things up, go to the [Get My Payment page on the IRS website](#).

If you haven't filed yet for 2019, the IRS will use your 2018 return as a basis for the payment amount. Payments will go to adults who have a Social Security number and are not dependents of someone else. The amount is \$1,200 for each adult and \$500 for each child under 17 in the household. For those with individual adjusted gross incomes over \$75K or couples over \$150K, the amount will be phased down by \$5 for every \$100 their AGI is over the limit, and will disappear entirely for those with AGIs over \$99k individuals/198K couples.

The payments will not be considered taxable income, nor will they be applied to any other monies owed to the IRS.

Old records - toss or keep?

With extra time to spare at home, many people are going through old papers and deciding what to discard or save. Here are some guidelines from PFPG's *Records Retention Guidelines BRIEF*:

Save: Keep with your tax return any checks, receipts, and statements that are tax-related (donations, credit card statements and receipts; medical expenses; pay stubs until you receive your W-2; evidence of large settlements; 1099s and capital gains records; any kind of insurance claim; year-end summaries of investment accounts). These tax-related documents should be kept at least 6 years (plus 6 more for year-end mutual fund summaries).

Keep **forever** current estate planning or trust-related documents; income tax returns; evidence of non-deductible IRA contributions; residential and mortgage records; home improvement receipts; documents relating to Social Security, military service, marriage/divorce, adoption, and birth/citizenship.

Discard (and shred!): papers from sold vehicles (except keep the transfer of title); non-tax-related checks and hard copy bank statements older than a year; paid loan coupon books; credit card receipts already on statement; all insurance policies that have been replaced & no possibility of claim; confirmations of nontaxable investment account transactions (IRAs) once reflected on monthly statement; expired warranties; receipts for purchases (unless needed for tax deductions, returns, or as statement of value for insurance).

Remember that if you access your banking or credit card payments/statements online, there can be limits on how long this information is available for you to download. And if you change banks, your banking history may be lost to you entirely. It's good practice to retrieve and save your statements monthly.

Implied warranties in Maine

The next time you buy a household item and are offered an extended warranty or service contract, take a look at a little-known law in Maine – implied warranty. Maine's Uniform Commercial Code provides automatic warranty protection on many consumer goods purchased for family, household, or personal use – even new cars (used cars are not included). This is in addition to the warranty already provided by the manufacturer/seller, and includes items received as a gift.

The law applies automatically for as much 4 years from the date of purchase. If you find that your purchase:

- a. is badly designed or defective and can't be used for its intended purpose as a result;
- b. hasn't been abused by improper use or not following the directions;
- c. was purchased no more than 4 years ago and is still within the term of its expected useful life,

you can make a case for receiving free repairs by either the manufacturer or the seller. Check out the [Office of the Maine Attorney General's web page](#) for a document explaining this law in more detail and a sample letter for making a claim. How to determine "expected useful life"? Check the manufacturer's website, Consumer Reports, or the [International Association of Certified Home Inspectors list](#) of common items. You can then make a judgment call about whether purchasing a service contract for an item with a relatively long expected life (e.g. a dishwasher) makes sense.

The [Maine Attorney General's Consumer Protection web page](#) covers other topics related to consumers' rights, including current scams, and is well worth a look.

Keeping fit when you can't get to the gym

Spring in Maine coupled with staying at home has put a crimp on many of our usual exercise routines, whether formal or informal. AARP has put together a selection of 10-minute videos by noted fitness experts, [Exercising at Home Just Got Easier](#). They are suitable for beginners as well as a range of abilities, and can be done comfortably from your living room with nothing fancier than a chair and a mat, and the mat is optional if you have a rug.

Want something gentler? There's a [10-minute Tai Chi warm-up](#) (see topic #3) on [nextavenue.org](#) that will relax you, even if you just watch it.

If you're looking for more of a cardiovascular workout, take a look at the three videos in "[In 6 Minutes, You Can Be Done With Your Workout](#)." No special equipment required, and you can mix and match the exercises for the four main muscle groups to create your own routine.

Keep well and in touch!

Brian Debra

Brian L. Dietz, CFP®, CFA
Debra Yoo, Director of Client Services

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Portland Financial Planning Group LLC | 511 Congress St., Suite 804, Portland, ME 04101