

CREDIT & DEBT

Freeze Your Credit in 3 Steps

Freezing your accounts at the three major credit bureaus is the best way to prevent thieves from opening new credit accounts in your name.



Tony Cordoza

Not so long ago, a credit freeze was a tool usually reserved for people who had suffered identity theft. But as data breaches have piled up, the freeze has become more widely recognized as the most effective way to protect your credit, even if a thief hasn't yet made fraudulent use of your personal information.

The reason: When you place a credit freeze (also known as a security freeze) on your credit reports, new creditors can't review them to judge whether you're eligible for a credit card or loan -- and in turn, lenders are unlikely to grant credit to fraudsters posing as you. When you need to shop for credit, you can temporarily lift the freeze.

Do I have to pay? Nope. Placing and lifting a freeze is free at each of the major credit agencies, thanks to federal law.

To set up a credit freeze, take these three steps.

1. Gather your information. At a minimum, you'll have to supply identifying information such as your Social Security number, birth date and address. If you haven't lived at your current home for more than a couple of years, you may need to have your previous address on hand, too.

Depending on the credit agency, you may need to set up a PIN that you'll use to confirm your identity when you want to temporarily lift or permanently remove the freeze. Experian requires a PIN of five to 10 digits. With TransUnion, you must provide a six-digit PIN to unfreeze your credit report by phone or mail. But if you go online, you can manage your freeze with a

password-protected account instead. Equifax no longer requires a PIN. You can use a password-protected online account or provide identity-verification information by phone or mail.

Think about the number you'd like to use for your PIN -- don't pick something obvious, such as your birth date -- and of passwords that you can use for your Equifax and TransUnion accounts, if you choose to place the freezes online. Keep a pen and paper handy to jot down your PINs and passwords.

2. Contact each credit agency. The web pages or phone numbers below are the quickest avenues to imposing a freeze. To submit your request by mail, use these addresses.

[Freeze your credit with Equifax](#)

Equifax Information Services LLC, P.O. Box 105788, Atlanta, GA 30348 (Fill out and submit this form to request a freeze by mail.)

888-298-0045

[Freeze your credit with Experian](#)

Experian Security Freeze, P.O. Box 9554, Allen, TX 75013

888-397-3742

[Freeze your credit with TransUnion](#)

TransUnion, P.O. Box 160, Woodlyn, PA 19094

888-909-8872

3. Save your PINs and passwords. Write down the PINs and online account passwords, and keep them in a safe place at home. When you're ready to shop for a loan or lift the freeze for any other reason, you can call the phone numbers or visit the websites listed above.

NYSUT NOTE: Interested in debt management guidance? The NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation-endorsed Cambridge Credit Counseling program can assist members with a better understanding of their debt consolidation and student loan repayment options. Cambridge has been assisting consumers with eliminating debt for more than 20 years, and NYSUT members are eligible to receive a free, no-obligation, debt and student loan consultation with one of Cambridge's certified counselors. Find the best course of action for your debt situation by [visiting the website](#) for more information.

Kiplinger