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The first step in any sound financial program is to reduce exposure to financial risk — even before implementing an investment strategy.

A well-designed risk management program may help protect you in the event of a disaster without burdening you with payments for protection that you may not need.

Prudent consumers are willing to cover the cost of affordable financial injuries themselves to keep their premiums low. They know that insurance is not meant to insulate them from the cost of every head cold or dented fender. The idea is protection from catastrophe.

**Strength in Numbers:** For hundreds of years, people have been joining forces against all kinds of calamities — including financial troubles. That’s the idea behind insurance: If enough people can pool their money and form a large enough fund, then together they can handle practically any financial disaster. Your motivation for participating is your own eligibility to draw from it if the disaster happens to be yours.

**Six Areas of Coverage**

In order to be adequately insured, you should consider these six major areas of protection:

- Medical
- Long-term care
- Disability income
- Property and casualty
- Liability
- Life
Medical Insurance

Medical coverage goes right to the heart of why people buy insurance in the first place: as a way to help protect themselves against loss.

The leading source of health insurance in this country is employer-sponsored insurance. In fact, 61 percent of the non-elderly population are insured through their employers or their spouses’ employers.

Types of Medical Coverage

**Indemnity plans**, or fee-for-service plans, normally cover hospitalization, outpatient care, and physician services in or out of the hospital. You select the service provider (physician) for consultation or treatment. You are billed for the service and are reimbursed by the insurance company, or you can “assign” direct payment to the provider from the insurance company. Indemnity plans typically require the payment of premiums, deductibles, and coinsurance. Limits on certain coverage or exclusions may apply. The three types of indemnity plans are basic, major medical, and comprehensive.

**Health maintenance organizations**, or HMOs, operate as prepaid health-care plans. You pay a monthly premium in addition to a small copayment for a visit to a physician, who may be on staff or contracted by the HMO. These contracts with doctors as well as hospitals typically result in lower costs than indemnity plans. HMOs are referred to as “managed care” because your health-care needs are “managed” by your primary-care physician.

**Preferred provider organizations**, or PPOs, may be established by an employer, an insurance company, or a health-care organization. PPOs are similar to HMOs in that contracted physicians and hospitals (preferred providers) provide services at a reduced cost than indemnity plans. You have the option of using the contracted physician or a physician of your choice, but deductibles and copayments are usually lower as an incentive for you to utilize the lower-cost provider.

Source: Employer Health Benefits 2012 Annual Survey, The Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research and Educational Trust

**Individual Health-Care Mandate**

As a result of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, most individuals who are not covered by an employer-sponsored or government health insurance program will be required to have “minimum essential coverage” or pay an annual penalty starting in 2014.
Cash Management

Cash management involves managing your cash flow, creating a liquidity fund, positioning your available cash, and building your net worth.

American Savings Patterns

Americans have been saving less and less of their disposable income, but from September 2008 to mid-2010 there was an upward trend. From a high of 10.9 percent in 1982, the personal savings rate has fallen to as low as 1.4 percent in 2005. In 2011, the rate was 3.4 percent.

Inflation and Taxes Can Take a Big Bite

If you’re not careful, inflation and taxes could take a big bite out of your savings. This worksheet will help you calculate how these factors will affect your investments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Initial investment</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interest rate</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>________%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Amount earned (line 1 x line 2)</td>
<td>$400</td>
<td>$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Federal income tax bracket</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>________%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. After-tax return (line 3 – [line 3 x line 4])</td>
<td>$288</td>
<td>$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Net value of account after taxes (line 1 + line 5)</td>
<td>$10,288</td>
<td>$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Inflation rate</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>________%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Value of the account after inflation and taxes (line 6 ÷ [1.00 + line 7])</td>
<td>$9,988</td>
<td>$________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Real rate of return (line 8 – line 1 ÷ line 1)</td>
<td>–0.12%</td>
<td>________%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This hypothetical example is not indicative of the performance of any specific investment product or class of investments.
Assess Your Current Situation

The first step in cash management is to assess your current situation.

Effective cash management is really just getting a realistic view of how much of your money is available to spend.

Without adequate information, you could get yourself into trouble.

Be careful when you use tomorrow’s dollars to pay for today’s needs.

To assess your current situation, start by making a list of your monthly income. Continue until you’ve determined exactly how much income is available to you on a monthly basis.

List all your fixed expenses. These are expenses that are the same every month — like your mortgage, rent, and car payments. List every bill you can think of that is the same amount every month of the year.

Next, list the monthly averages for any nonfixed expenses. Items like the electric bill may vary widely from season to season. Figure the monthly average and list that number.

Nonmonthly periodic expenses need to be calculated to fit a monthly time frame. If your auto insurance is $800 every six months, that works out to be $133 per month.

And be honest with yourself. There’s no use in trying to manipulate these numbers. They’re not for anyone else. They’re for your own personal use.

Once you’ve listed everything, compare income and expenses. There are several items to evaluate. Determine which expenses are fixed and which are flexible. You may be able to reduce the ones over which you have control. Shortfalls can create havoc with anyone’s financial situation. Surpluses, on the other hand, are wonderful — if you invest or save.
Investment Options

Bonds and Interest Rate Risk

Because bonds are essentially fixed-interest loans, the market value of a bond is at risk when interest rates fluctuate. Bond prices generally fall when interest rates rise.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bond Maturity</th>
<th>Face Value</th>
<th>New Market Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
<td>$894</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This interest rate risk is higher when bond maturities lengthen.

Value of a Bond When Interest Rates Rise 1%

Value of a Bond When Interest Rates Fall 1%

Assumes $1,000 bonds paying 6% interest.

These results will occur only if you decide to sell your bond holdings before they mature. If you hold the bonds to maturity, you'll receive the interest payments due (barring default, of course) and then receive your full principal.

These are hypothetical examples used for illustrative purposes only and do not represent any specific investment. Actual results will vary.
Types of Bonds

There are three basic types of bonds:

- **U.S. government**
- **Municipal**
- **Corporate**

Treasury bonds are long-term debt obligations of the U.S. government with maturities ranging from 10 to 50 years. They are sold in denominations of $1,000 and up and offer a fixed rate of return that is paid semi-annually. The interest earned on these bonds is exempt from state and local taxes. Treasury bonds are guaranteed by the U.S. government as to the timely payment of principal and interest.

A municipal bond is a debt obligation issued by a state, county, parish, or local government or some other municipal authority, such as a publicly owned water district. Municipal bonds are typically issued to obtain funds to build or repair public facilities such as streets, bridges, waterworks, and schools. Interest on municipal bonds is generally exempt from federal income tax. If you purchase municipal bonds of the state or city in which you live, the interest may be exempt from state or local income taxes. Some municipal bond interest could be subject to the federal AMT. If you sell a municipal bond for a profit, you could incur capital gains taxes.

Corporate bonds are the major source of corporate borrowing. Debenture or unsecured bonds are backed by the general credit of the corporation. Asset-backed or secured bonds are backed by specific corporate assets, such as property or equipment. These bonds generally have a higher yield than government bonds, but the income they produce is fully taxable.
These dollar limitations are for the 2013 tax year and are adjusted annually for inflation.

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**How Taxes Work**

**Who Is Paying All Those Taxes?**

It might surprise you to learn that the wealthiest 25 percent of taxpayers pay 87 percent of federal income taxes. And here’s the real eye-opener for most people: The wealthiest 25 percent of taxpayers are households with $69,126 or more in adjusted gross income (AGI).²

**Federal Income Tax Brackets**

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Sources:
1 Nolo.com
2 Internal Revenue Service, 2012
How Taxes Work

Phaseout Limits Affecting High-Income Taxpayers

High-income taxpayers are subject to phaseout limits that could affect their personal exemptions and itemized deductions.

**Personal exemption phaseout**

- Subtract 2% of personal exemption for every $2,500 of AGI over:
  - $250,000 (single filers)
  - $300,000 (married joint filers)
  - $150,000 (married filing separately)

**Itemized deduction phaseout**

- Reduce itemized deductions by 3% of the amount that exceeds:
  - $250,000 (single filers)
  - $300,000 (married joint filers)
  - $150,000 (married filing separately)

Alternative Minimum Tax

The alternative minimum tax (AMT) was instituted in an attempt to curtail the effect of tax advantages that enabled some wealthy taxpayers to pay little or no income taxes. If you use certain strategies to lower your income tax liability, the AMT kicks in to force you to pay a set income tax.

Taxpayers are given an AMT exemption. The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 replaced annual exemption "patches" with permanent exemption levels that will be indexed annually for inflation.

The AMT can be somewhat complicated. If you’re affected, you have to compute your taxes twice — using the regular tax system and then using the AMT formula. You would pay any AMT obligation in addition to your regular tax liability. If you think you may be at risk of triggering the AMT, you may want to consult a tax professional.

These dollar limitations are for the 2013 tax year and are scheduled to be adjusted annually for inflation.

**Did you know?**

- The permanent change in the AMT exemption should save more than 30 million taxpayers from being subject to the AMT on returns filed for the 2012 tax year.
- **2012 AMT exemption:** $50,600 for single filers, $78,750 for married joint filers and surviving spouses, and $39,375 for married taxpayers filing separately.
- **2013 AMT exemption:** $51,900 for single filers, $80,750 for married joint filers and surviving spouses, and $40,375 for married taxpayers filing separately.

Sources: Internal Revenue Service, 2012; CCH, 2013; Time, January 3, 2013