



Looking Forward

# Make These Four Money Moves Before 2019 Ends

SET YOURSELF UP FOR A WEALTHIER NEW YEAR BY FOLLOWING THESE TIME-SENSITIVE TIPS FROM FINANCIAL EXPERTS.

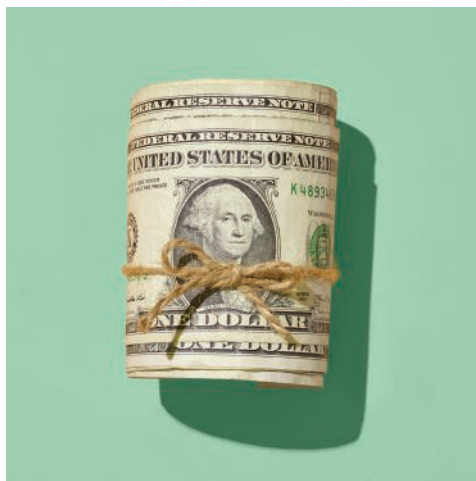
By Maggie Puniewska

PROP STYLING BY MEGAN KIANTOS

1  
-

### Fully fund your retirement account.

Put as much as you can into a traditional 401(k) or IRA before the end of the year. A higher contribution can lower your taxable income, so you could pay less in taxes in April, says certified financial planner Misty Lynch, head of planning at John Hancock in Boston. If your company offers it, take advantage of employer matching—essentially free money for retirement. Aim to hit your contribution limit as soon as possible; waiting means losing time in the market for your investment to grow, says Manisha Thakor, vice president of financial well-being at Brighton Jones, a wealth management and financial planning firm. This year, you can squirrel away up to \$19,000 in a 401(k) and \$6,000 in an IRA (traditional and/or Roth). People ages 50 and over can put an additional \$1,000 in an IRA. Need to catch up? If you received an annual bonus or other financial windfall, deposit all or most of it straight into your retirement account.

2  
-

### Do a security check.

Fraud attempts rise by over 23 percent at year's end due to holiday spending. Delete credit card and other personal info saved in your browser, says Lyn Tran, chief product officer at FigLeaf, a consumer privacy company. (Go into your browser's Preferences to delete data and turn off autofill.) See if your bank has a virtual credit card program; instead of plugging in your card numbers during checkout, you receive a randomly generated, one-time-use sequence. And before ordering something, always confirm that the checkout page has a secure connection. The URL should include "https," and a padlock or key symbol should appear on the far left of the address bar.

4  
-

### Take advantage of cheaper health care.

By December, you've probably met your health insurance deductible, so it's the perfect time to receive routine care and elective procedures that may cost more once January arrives, says Sharon Orrange, MD, clinical associate professor of medicine at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California. Get up-to-date on immunizations, book a skin check with your dermatologist, or finally schedule that colonoscopy. A Zocdoc survey found that November and December are typically slower months for many practices, meaning appointments might be easier to come by.

3  
-

### Consider charitable giving.

December is a good time to be generous. If you itemize deductions, giving gifts to qualified charities before December 31 can reduce your tax bill. Use the Tax Exempt Organization Search tool on [irs.gov](https://irs.gov) to check whether a charity qualifies for tax-deductible donations, says Thakor. Gifts of \$250 or more require a dated receipt that includes the gift amount and a description. Donations under \$250 don't require detailed records, but Thakor suggests keeping them anyway in case you're audited. The maximum amount you can deduct for charitable donations depends on your financial situation; ask an accountant how much you should give and how often. Next year, consider making automatic monthly donations to your favorite causes. These gifts help nonprofits manage budgets and figure out what they can spend each month.