

We're Looking Out For You



Pinellas County Consumer Protection
www.pinellascounty.org/consumer
(727) 464-6200



Budgeting and Saving Tips

- A budget is a plan you write down to decide how you will spend your money each month. Without a budget, you might run out of money before your next paycheck. Use a budget Worksheet to help you get started:
<https://www.consumer.gov/section/managing-your-money>.
- By law you are entitled to receive a free copy of your credit report every year from each of the three major credit reporting agencies: TransUnion, Equifax, Experian. For your free credit report, call Annual Credit Report at 1-877-322-8228 or go to www.annualcreditreport.com.
- Limit your wants. Your specialty coffee may only cost \$4.00, but over a month's time that cup of coffee will have cost you \$120.00.
- Many companies solicit new credit card accounts and insurance policies using prescreened offers — sometimes called "preapproved" offers, based on information in your credit report. If you decide that you don't want to receive prescreened offers, you can opt-out by calling toll-free 1-888-5-OPT-OUT (1-888-567-8688) or visiting www.optoutprescreen.com.
- Credit cards offer different deals. Before you get a credit card, ask some questions. Is there an annual fee to use the card? What is the APR? Are there other fees? What is the grace period?
- Avoid payday, cash advance or title loans. These are short term loans that you pay a high fee to borrow a small amount of money. If you cannot repay the money you owe, you may end up owing more in fees than the borrowed amount or with a title loan the lender can take your vehicle.
- When saving money, consider opening a savings account. A savings account can help keep the money you are saving separate from the money you need to spend in checking. Most savings accounts pay interest, so that means the money you save will grow a little over time.
- Debit cards look like credit cards. But they do not work the same way. Credit cards use money that you borrow. Debit cards use money that is already in your checking account.
- Ways to save: downgrade your cable, cell phone, or other premium services. Shop the sales, use coupons, or take advantage of promotional and BOGO's.
- Make your monthly payments on time to avoid late fees or additional interest. This will also help you build better credit.