

LET'S TALK

MONEY[®]

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The Search for Life

If you're in the market for life insurance, comparing policies can almost seem impossible. After all there are so many different types of life insurance policies, and countless features even when comparing similar types of insurance. While a financial professional can give you more information, there are some ways you can narrow your choices down.

Apples to Apples

There are a handful of different types of life insurance policies, but you can separate them into different piles: those offering only a death benefit and those that offer both a death benefit and potential cash value.

Within these categories are sub-categories. Term life insurance may be renewed annually (with premiums subject to increase) or over longer terms. Or you can buy level premium term life insurance, in which premium payments remain unchanged for a specified number of years. In the cash value life insurance category, there are policies in which the life insurance company pays you an interest rate and others in which your cash value depends on investments you choose.

The moral of this search: Don't compare apples to oranges, compare apples to apples.

Other Features

Once you get to comparing apples to apples, contrast ratings, which signify the financial strength of insurers. Compare features, of which there can be many.



These features, also known as riders, may be free or cost an additional premium. For example, a term life insurance policy may grant you the right for a fixed period of time to convert to a whole life insurance policy without medical underwriting. Other policy riders pay a portion of the death benefit before death if you are terminally ill, waive your premium payments if you become totally disabled and provide an additional death benefit in the event of some accidental deaths.

Don't forget to look at exclusions when comparing policies. Some may fully insure your life immediately while others may not do the same for a year or two. Other exclusions could include manageable health conditions such as high blood pressure, a condition which another insurer may not exclude. Also make sure to look at other exclusions, such as death by drug overdose, suicide or even sky-diving.

For the most accurate comparison, remember to research policies with the same features when comparing costs.



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Insurance Version

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Save Big After the Holidays

If you want to score big on bargain-priced goodies, one of the best times to buy is right after the holidays. Here's how to rack up big money-savings as you start on next year's holiday shopping.

When to Shop

While brick-and-mortar and internet stores typically offer sales for up to a week after Christmas, December 26 has historically been the best day to shop. It's first come, first served. Stores looking to rid themselves of excess inventory offer deals that may rival those of Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving. Christmas decorations usually come with the biggest discounts, so think "next year."

Shop Second Generation

Look for second- and third-generation new and refurbished electronics. While others may stand in line waiting to buy the newest smartphone, you can find a previous version at a fraction of the price. Don't forget to shop for older computers, video games, televisions and other electronics, as manufacturers get ready to roll out new models.

Use Those Gift Cards

If you really like to save, consider using merchandise exchanges and gift cards you received this holiday to lower your out-of-pocket costs even more as you shop for the next holiday season.

Cut Your Holiday Travel Costs

Americans usually travel during the holidays, which can cost more than a few dollars even with thoughtful planning. Here's how to save money on the ground and in the air.

On the Ground



If you'll spend some time in the family vehicle, consider ways to cut gasoline costs that always seem to rise during the holidays. Some wholesale buying clubs sell gasoline at discounts that can save you a couple of dollars. You can also look for apps that alert you to the lowest gas prices wherever you travel.

Pack some sandwiches, snacks and games to keep the kids occupied if you expect to travel for hours. If you'll need lodging, use rewards cards if the establishment offers lower prices for members. Also look for discount books, where you could find coupons for your favorite hotel, when using rest stops on major highways and interstates.

By Air

Look to fly during off-peak hours, including on the holiday itself, for some of the lowest airline fares you will find. Also look to travel to and from secondary airports, which often costs less than flying to the big ones. To save on checked baggage charges, make sure everyone arrives at the airport with a fully packed carry-on bag or suitcase, as long as the airline doesn't charge for it.



Combo



Enlist family and friends to pick you up from the airport if you don't expect to need your own vehicle. If you have to rent after flying to a destination, don't buy insurance for the same coverage you may already have. Check with your auto insurer before traveling.

Big Hearts: Giving to Charity

Americans gave an estimated \$390.05 billion to U.S. charities in 2016, according to Giving USA 2017: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2016 (from the Giving USA Foundation, the Giving Institute and the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy). The total includes charitable contributions made by individuals, estates, foundations and corporations.

How to Choose

If you want to give to an organization that makes the most of your charitable giving, learn how much of each dollar goes toward the charity and how much is spent elsewhere. You can find some organizations with websites that evaluate the legitimacy of charities and how they spend contributions. Also look for a charity's IRS Form 990 and ask to see the charity's audited financial statement to ensure it meets the standards you want.

Importantly, match your giving objectives with a charity's mission and demonstrated results.

Look for charities that best match your values.

Get Help

If you make large charitable contributions, consider enlisting the aid of your advisor and an estate planning attorney. Although the federal estate tax exclusion is higher than in the past, some families may exceed it while also having to potentially deal with lower state estate and inheritance tax thresholds. Structured properly, charitable giving can both benefit your charity and reduce your estate taxes.

Giving Life Insurance

In this season of giving, some people want to give more to a favorite charity or organization, but don't have the funds to do so. Giving the gift of life insurance is a cost-efficient way to increase your charitable giving:

Your Choice

There are a few ways to give life insurance, some of which may include current or future tax advantages. Talk to your accounting professional to learn more about how you may best benefit a charity and potentially receive tax benefits in return.

Charitable Choices

One way is to rename a charity as beneficiary, which eventually removes this benefit from your estate. Or you could donate the policy, but continue to pay the premiums.

Another way to make charitable use of life insurance is to ask your insurance company if it can issue a charitable rider, directing a percentage of the death benefit to a named charity. If, for example, you have a \$500,000 policy and you acquire a rider of 10%, the charity would eventually receive \$50,000, with your named beneficiaries receiving the remainder.



How We Give

In 2016, Americans continued to give billions of dollars in charitable contributions to their favorite causes and organizations.* Here's a breakdown of who gave what:

*Source: Giving USA 2017: The Annual Report on Philanthropy for the Year 2016.



Individuals:

\$281.86

Billion



Foundations:

\$59.28

Billion



Bequests:

\$30.36

Billion



Corporations:

\$18.55

Billion

Four Documents Most People Need

When it comes to creating a long-term financial and personal strategy, four documents may play a key role in your life. A will, powers of financial and healthcare attorney and an advance directive can help organize your life and your estate.

Advance Directive

Also known as a living will, an advance directive is a legal document that dictates the treatment you want in various medical situations. It may instruct medical professionals not to resuscitate you or provide a ventilator or feeding tube in the event of severe medical events, which you would name. This is a major life decision, so it is vital to talk to family before putting your wishes in writing.

Powers of Attorney

There are two types of legal powers you can grant loved ones, an advisor or others: One is a financial power of attorney and the other is a healthcare power of attorney. These separate legal documents dictate who would make your financial or healthcare decisions if you are incapacitated or otherwise unable to make these decisions on your own.



While most people associate these powers with medical incapacitation, you can also use them in other situations. For example, you could be overseas without access to your financial life. In this situation, you could grant financial powers of attorney to someone for the length of time you are unavailable.

Your Directions in Writing

The final document is actually the first you might consider creating, the foundation of most financial strategies. That foundation is a will, in which you dictate who gets what assets of yours after you die. While you may also require the use of trusts if you have a complex estate, a will determines who gets your home, jewelry, investments and other assets. They may be as large as a luxury home or as small as a sentimental piece of costume jewelry, but their disposition matters to your loved ones.

Life as an Asset

Even if you don't have many assets, a will provides other important safeguards, including the naming of guardians for minor or special-needs adult children. You may also add to your assets cost-efficiently with life insurance. This protection's death benefit can replace a portion of the income beneficiaries depend on from you, or it can provide an income tax-free financial legacy to survivors.

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