



# Consumer News & Views

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



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## Consumer Confidence Decreases in February



The Conference Board's consumer confidence index dropped to 102.9 in February of 2023 from 106 in January.

The board has seen some first indicators of consumer spending restraint, notably concerning big purchases like appliances, cars, and houses.

- Consumers' assessment of current business conditions worsened in February.
- 17.8% of consumers said business conditions were "good," down from 19.9%.
- Consumers' appraisal of the **labor market** was more favorable.
- 52.0% of consumers said jobs were "plentiful," up from 48.1%.
- While 12-month inflation expectations improved—falling to 6.3 percent from 6.7 percent last month—consumers may be showing early signs of pulling back spending in the face of high prices and rising interest rates.
- Due to recession fears, fewer consumers are planning to purchase homes, autos, or travel for vacation, and they also appear to be scaling back plans to buy major appliances.

The **Present Situation Index**—based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions—increased to 152.8 (1985=100) from 151.1 last month.

The **Expectations Index**—based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions—fell further to 69.7 (1985=100) from a downwardly revised 76.0 in January.

# Climate Change Time Bomb--Tick tick



U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on wealthy countries Monday to move up their goals of achieving carbon neutrality as close as possible to 2040, mostly from 2050 now, in order to "defuse the climate time bomb." Introducing a capstone report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on the impacts and trajectory of global warming, Guterres delivered a blunt assessment of the challenge to prevent climate catastrophe.

"Humanity is on thin ice, and that ice is melting fast," the United Nations chief said in a video message as the IPCC experts group issued its latest report, which he likened to "a survival guide for humanity."

Guterres said the world still has time to limit average temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to pre-industrial times but this requires "a quantum leap in climate action" by all countries in all sectors.

"It starts with parties immediately hitting the fast-forward button on their net zero deadlines," Guterres said, but he acknowledged countries have different levels of responsibility and ability to change course.

Rich countries should commit to achieving carbon neutrality as close as possible to 2040, he said, calling it "the limit they should all aim to respect."

"Carbon neutrality" or "net zero carbon emissions" refer to goals for cutting emissions of carbon dioxide, one of the most prevalent greenhouse gases warming the planet, which results from the burning of fossil fuels.

Scientists say the impacts of climate change are being felt in more frequent and extreme conditions around the globe, ranging from droughts that threaten food supplies to record rainfall and coastal floods.

As things stand now most rich countries have set their emissions goal at 2050 but some are more ambitious, like Finland (2035), or Germany and Sweden (2045).

Leaders in emerging economies must commit to reaching net zero as close as possible to 2050, he said without naming any specific nation. Major countries in this category have set more distant goals like China (2060) and India (2070).

U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry said in a statement that the message of the latest report "is abundantly clear: we are making progress, but not enough. We have the tools to stave off and reduce the risks of the worst impacts of the climate crisis, but we must take advantage of this moment to act now."

He noted a number of steps the U.S. is taking, including provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act, which President Biden signed into law in August, that Kerry says are projected to cut U.S. emissions 50-52% below 2005 levels in 2030. The act includes rebates and tax credits for homeowners to increase energy efficiency.

Guterres, who will hold a climate action summit in September, again stressed the role of the Group of 20 – the world's largest economies and Europe, which together are responsible for 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.

"This is the moment for all G20 members to come together in a joint effort, pooling their resources and scientific capacities as well as their proven and affordable technologies through the public and private sectors to make carbon neutrality a reality by 2050," Guterres said.



# What Your Blood Type and Your Health Have in Common

Do you know your blood type? There's a good chance that you don't. More Americans know their horoscope sign (66 percent) than their blood type (51 percent), according to a survey published this year by medical laboratory company Quest Diagnostics.

There are compelling health reasons why you should know, especially when it comes to your heart. Research suggests that people with certain blood types — namely A and B — are at higher risk to develop blood clots and to have heart attacks and strokes.

"We think about blood type a lot when we think about transfusions," says Robert Salazar, M.D., a cardiologist at Memorial Hermann Health System in Houston. There may be some benefits to know about it for heart health, he adds. "Increasingly, there is a push towards the individualization of medicine and medical advice," he explains. Adding information about blood type, he says, may help inform doctors on how to best treat patients.

## Types of blood

Blood types are determined by the presence or absence of certain substances, called antigens, that can trigger an immune response if they are foreign to the body.

There are four main blood types: A, B, O and AB, according to the American Red Cross. In addition to these antigens, there's a protein called the Rh factor, which can either be present (+) or absent (-). That means there are eight blood subtypes: A+, A-, B+, B-, O+, O-, AB+, AB-.

## Types A and B and blood clots

People with blood types A and B are at higher risk to develop blood clots compared with people who have type O blood, according to a 2020 study published in the American Heart Association journal *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis, and Vascular Biology*. The study, which looked at more than 400,000 people, found that types A and B were 50 percent more likely to develop blood clots in the legs called deep vein thrombosis and 47 percent more likely to develop a pulmonary embolism — when a clot travels to the lungs — than people with type O blood.

They were 8 percent more likely to have a heart attack and 10 percent more likely to experience heart failure than type Os.

## Why blood type affects clot risk

There are many possible reasons for why this happens, says Mary Cushman, M.D., a hematologist at the University of Vermont Medical Center and a professor of medicine and pathology at the Larner College of Medicine at UVM in Burlington, Vermont.



"The enzyme that controls blood type has other actions," she explains. One of these is to modify a protein called von Willebrand factor, which is very important in forming blood clots. "The modifications to the protein are different in different blood types," she says. "So people with type O blood have the lowest levels of von Willebrand factor on average and the lowest risk of abnormal clots. Type AB has the highest level and, in some studies, the highest risk of blood clots."

There may also be some differences in platelets, the small cell fragments in the blood that form clots, says Joshua Beckman, a cardiologist at the UT Southwestern Medical Center. This may make you more susceptible to clotting.

## Type A, type AB and cholesterol, stroke

There's evidence to suggest that type A blood is linked to higher levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the waxy substance that clogs arteries. Type AB blood is linked to inflammation, which may adversely affect blood vessels. Larger studies need to be done before coming to any definite conclusions, Beckman says.

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Blood type may impact stroke risk, too. A 2022 study published in the medical journal *Neurology* reviewed 48 studies of 17,000 stroke patients and found that people with type A were 16 percent more likely to have an early stroke than people with other blood types, and those with type O were 12 percent less likely. An earlier study done by Cushman found that blood type AB, compared with O, had a 1.8 times higher risk of stroke; other blood types weren't affected.

**Blood type and other health risks**

Scientists are studying how blood type might affect risks from the COVID-19 virus, but they say it's too early to draw firm conclusions. Research has linked type O blood with a lower chance of getting seriously ill from cholera, and it may offer some protection from severe malaria.

**What you can do**

It's important to keep research findings in context. Though certain blood types could mean an increased chance of health problems such as blood clots and stroke, the risk is relatively small compared with the dangers of smoking and high blood pressure, and blood type doesn't tell you much about your personal risk, Cushman points out.

You also shouldn't let your blood type give you a false sense of security. If you're having surgery or if you have cancer – both situations that can raise the risk of blood clots – Cushman recommends that you talk to your health care provider about a blood clot prevention plan. “If you have O blood type, you may have slightly lower risk of some diseases like thrombosis, but it doesn't completely protect you from the risk,” she says. Thrombosis occurs when clots block blood vessels.

Knowing your blood type may give you added insight into your heart health, Salazar says. Though doctors often talk about manageable risk factors, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and smoking, there's less conversation around genes or the genetic risk for heart disease, he says. Having a patient's blood type is a “way to try to narrow down individuals who may be at high risk,” he says. For these people, following the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8 – eating right, staying active, not smoking, getting enough sleep, managing weight, controlling cholesterol, managing blood sugar and managing blood pressure – may be even more important.

Regardless of your blood type, everyone should have a heart-healthy lifestyle, Cushman says. “Following the guidance of the American Heart Association's Life's Essential 8, for example, will add years to your life and reduce your risk of thrombosis-related outcomes like heart attack, stroke and venous thrombosis,” she says.

**How to find out your blood type**

A simple blood test can reveal your blood type. If you're curious, you can ask your doctor to have it tested the next time you need bloodwork. There's another very quick and easy way to figure out your blood type that's also altruistic: Give blood.

A 2019 national survey conducted by the Red Cross found that more than half of people believe they need to know their blood type to do so, but that's not true. Once you give blood, you'll learn your blood type when you receive your donor card, and you can create a profile through the Red Cross Blood Donor App. Slightly more than a third – 37 percent – of the world's population has the most frequently occurring blood type, O+.



# Top Spring Cleaning Tips of the Pros



Spring is here, which means so is your home's annual deep clean. Not only is spring cleaning a great way to reset (that's what the season is all about!), but the yearly chore also gets rid of any accumulated dust and dander before allergy season reaches full swing. Cleaning your home from top to bottom may never become effortless. Whether you prefer to proceed from the attic to the basement or start outdoors and wind your way inside, create a realistic schedule and focus on one task at a time. You'll need several days for more involved projects, such as mopping floors and organizing closets, but in due time, you'll check everything off your list—and have a sparkling clean home by the end of it.

## Restock Your Cleaning Supplies

Before starting your spring cleaning journey, you'll want to make sure you have all of the tools necessary to complete every task on your list. There are a handful of cleaning supplies you'll need, but your list will be largely dictated by your own personal cleaning methods. As a general guide, though, most spring cleaning kits should ensure they have the following:

- Bucket
- Clean microfiber cloths
- Sponges
- Reusable spray bottle
- All-purpose cleaner
- Duster
- White distilled vinegar
- Baking soda
- Dish soap
- Vacuum
- Mop

## What to Clean in Every Room

There are some general cleaning tasks you should complete in every room of your house, from your attic all the way to your basement.

### 1. Clean Baseboards

Spring cleaning is the perfect time to clean your baseboards. Baseboards can be easily cleaned with a vacuum with a bristled brush hose attachment to remove any dust; then, wipe them down with a damp microfiber cloth and all-purpose cleaner.

### 2. Dust

No matter how much you try to prevent it, dust builds up in every room of the house. When dusting, work from the top of a room down, vacuuming the dust that settles on the floor. This includes hard-to-reach places, such as the tops of ceiling fans and window casings.

Don't forget to also dust your books and bookshelves. Take everything off the shelves, and brush them (along with the books) with a feather duster. Use the dust brush or crevice tool on a vacuum to reach into tight spots. Wipe the spines of leather-bound books with a clean, soft cloth.

### 3. Vacuum

Go over all of your floors with a vacuum to get up any crumbs and loose dirt. Tracking bacteria and dirt from your shoes across the carpet is common. It can cause a buildup of grime and harbor pollutants that can make you sick.

### 4. Shampoo Rugs

Synthetic carpets and rugs with waterproof backings can be deep-cleaned with a rotary shampoo machine and a hot-water extraction machine. Rugs without backings, including Oriental rugs, require professional cleaning.

### 5. Wipe Walls and Ceilings

Overtime our walls and ceilings build up with unwanted marks. To clean them, start by using a vacuum to remove dust. Next, tackle stubborn surface grime, especially prevalent in kitchens, with a solvent-free degreaser (test it first in an inconspicuous area to ensure it won't mar the surface).

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**CONTINUED****6. Clean Upholstered Furnishings**

Take cushions outside and gently beat them by hand to remove dust. If there are stains, check the pieces for care labels. Use a vacuum's upholstery and crevice tools to clean under seat cushions.

**7. Polish Metal Door and Window Hardware**

Return dull knobs, hinges, and other metal finishes to their former glory with a quick polish. Liquid polishes and polish-impregnated cloths work well for medium-tarnished surfaces, while pastes and creams are best for heavier work.

**8. Wax Surfaces**

Wipe wooden surfaces with a soft cloth dampened with water and mild dishwashing liquid. Apply paste wax a few feet at a time with a cotton rag folded into a square pad. Let the wax dry; buff with a clean cloth.

Additionally, vinyl and linoleum floors that have lost their shine should be waxed with a polish designed for these surfaces. Most stone and tile floors can be treated with either a paste or a liquid wax designed for the material.

**9. Clean Window Furnishings**

Drapes, curtains, and blinds should also be tended to. "While we may not directly interact with them, curtains can accumulate dust and odors from around the home and need to be cleaned," says Stapf. "Give the curtains a little extra TLC once every season, but look at their material before throwing them in the washing machine. Some may need to be sent to the dry cleaners."

**10. Wash Window Screens**

Window screens get very dirty throughout the year. Clean them using warm water and a mild dishwashing liquid, scrubbing each screen with a brush. Once clean, rinse them thoroughly with water.

**11. Clean Light Fixtures**

Light fixtures are a hub for dust. "Your ceiling fan is a great place to start—just make sure you turn off the light bulb and let it cool before wiping them down," says Amos. "When it comes to your lamps, be sure to unplug those as it gives them time to cool off before starting the cleaning process."

**12. Implement Fire Safety**

Change batteries in smoke detectors (this should be done twice a year) and make sure units are free of dust. Teach everyone in your household how to use a fire extinguisher, and review escape plans.

**Room-by-Room Spring Cleaning Checklists**

Now that you know which tasks are universal, add these room-by-room tasks to your master list.

**Kitchen**

- Dust refrigerator coils
- Defrost the freezer
- Clean out pantry
- Deep clean oven
- Deep clean inside refrigerator
- Clean cabinets
- Clean small appliances

**Bathroom**

- Discard expired cosmetics and beauty products
- Update first-aid kit
- Deep clean shower
- Wash bathmats
- Deep clean toilet and sink
- Wash towels and linens
- Replace or wash shower liner
- Clean grout

**Bedroom**

- Wash all bedding
- Deep clean your mattress
- Declutter closet, dresser, and under your bed
- Wash pillows

**Outdoor Spaces**

- Scrub deck and patio
- Wash driveway
- Treat mildew
- Wash outdoor furniture
- Check for damaged wires and connections on light fixtures

Have a happy and bright Spring!

## *Top Medications that are Dangerous if Stopped Cold Turkey*



Nearly one-third of Americans have stopped taking a prescription drug at some time without consulting their doctor, according to the 2017 NPR-Truven Health Analytics Health Poll. The biggest reason given for not even starting a prescription was cost. Reasons given by survey respondents for discontinuing a medication included: side effects (29%), didn't need (17%), felt better (16%), not working (15%), and cost (10%).

When you abruptly stop taking a prescription medication without telling your doctor it's called medication non-adherence, and it is estimated to result in increased hospitalizations and premature deaths, alongside a whopping healthcare bill for America that totals anywhere between \$100 billion and \$289 billion a year, according to an NPR report. It may seem like the medication isn't working (maybe the dosage needs to be adjusted) or like you're feeling better or don't need it (you won't be feeling better when the meds wear off and symptoms return).

Stopping some medications can cause withdrawal symptoms that leave you feeling worse than when you started. It's important to always talk with your doctor first before you stop taking any of your prescription medicines, especially the following types of meds.

### **Blood pressure medications**

"Blood pressure medications like beta-blockers are used to keep the heart beating nice and slow," says Barry Grossman, MD, clinical instructor of medicine at New York University. "If you were to stop taking it suddenly the beta-blocker could have a rebound effect like a racing heart."

In fact, a rebound episode could result in ischemia of the heart and a dramatic rise in blood pressure and heart rate. All of which are the building blocks for a heart attack in the future. Learn exactly what to do if you think you're having a heart attack.

### **Blood Thinners**

Two to three million Americans take blood thinners, medicines that prevent blood clots from forming, according to WebMD. Blood clots found in your arteries, veins, and heart can cause heart attacks, strokes, and blockages. Anticoagulants like Coumadin, a type of blood thinner, should always be taken as directed and never stopped without your doctor's knowledge.

"Every doctor I've known who has patients that have run out or decided they didn't want to take [their anticoagulant] anymore had a stroke because they stopped [taking it]," says Grossman.

### **Anti-anxiety medications**

Benzodiazepines are the most prominently used class of anti-anxiety drugs. Even though the drug is great at providing immediate relief against anxiety symptoms, don't be fooled into believing that you can stop taking them once your anxiety has ceased. "With long term use and frequent use of these drugs, a physiological dependence can develop," says David Henderson, MD, professor chair of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine.

"The abrupt stopping in that class could lead to consequences like withdrawal symptoms similar to alcohol withdrawal and even seizures." Your risk of seizures is greatest during the first 24 to 72 hours after you stop. In order to prevent these withdrawal symptoms and seizure risk, your doctor will slowly taper your dosage until your body is safely off the drug entirely.

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**CONTINUED****Antidepressants**

Withdrawal symptoms from antidepressants aren't nearly as dangerous as anti-anxiety meds, but they're still very uncomfortable. You're likely to experience headaches, lightheadedness, nausea, and sweating. "The risk of relapse is a great concern," says Henderson. The general rule of thumb for antidepressants: If a patient's symptoms improve after taking the medication for six months to a year, then the doctor can consider tapering them off. Tapering is important; the faster you quit antidepressants cold turkey, the more you increase your risk of relapsing back into a depression again.

**Steroids**

Your body's adrenal glands make a natural steroid hormone called cortisol, a powerful anti-inflammatory. But sometimes we need an extra punch of steroids in our bodies to fight off an acute illness or inflammation. This is when prescription steroids, like the commonly used prednisone, are valuable. Grossman describes prednisone as a "double-edged sword" because when you start taking the medication "your adrenal glands will say, 'Hey, we're getting the steroid from a pill. Let's go on vacation.'"

If you stop taking the steroid suddenly, your body's adrenal glands will need about a week or two to wake up and start making cortisol again. Weakness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal pain may ensue, due to the low levels of cortisol in your system. A doctor can slowly wean you off of the steroids and ease your body back into making cortisol on its own again without the horrible withdrawal effects. Prednisone is a medication where the dose has to be right or it could make you sick.

**Opioid pain medications**

Codeine, morphine, and hydrocodone are opioids that doctors prescribe to treat pain. "If someone has taken it for months at a substantial dose, when they stop it, they're going to go in withdrawal which is the same as seeing someone who is using heroine on the street," says Grossman.

Restlessness, anxiety, diarrhea, and generalized pain are just a few of the withdrawal symptoms someone may experience if they stop taking opioids cold turkey.

Once again, your doctor can taper the dosage until you're off the medication completely and help you avoid unpleasant withdrawal symptoms. If you are being prescribed opioids for the first time, ask about alternatives.

**Eye drops for glaucoma**

Glaucoma is an eye disease that is caused by fluid buildup in the front portion of your eye, which can damage the eye's optic nerve needed for sight. According to the National Eye Institute, the number of people in the U.S. with glaucoma will more than double by 2050 to 6.3 million people.

"Eye drops help decrease the pressure in the eyes," says Grossman. "But some people get tired of putting drops in their eyes and the eye pressure will go back to the way it was." If the pressure from the fluid buildup continues, it can further damage the eye's optic nerve and potentially lead to blindness in the future.

**Anticonvulsants**

People who take anti-seizure medications should never discontinue them abruptly as it can also create a rebound effect and greatly increase your seizure frequency. For some other anti-seizure medications, you may experience withdrawal symptoms within the next 24 to 48 hours. Agitation, confusion, and disorientation are some of the most commonly reported withdrawal symptoms.

**Thyroid medication**

People with hyperthyroid (overactive thyroid) and hypothyroid (underactive thyroid) need medication to regulate their thyroid's hormone production, which helps control metabolism. People with hyperthyroid who stop taking their medications may trigger a "thyroid storm." A life-threatening condition accompanied by a rapid heartbeat, fever, fainting, and if left untreated, coma.

Now that you know the side effects from stopping certain medications cold turkey, check out the truly bizarre side effects caused by 10 common medications, including thyroid meds.



## *The Recession May Be Postponed--but not indefinitely*



A recession could be postponed for years, and the stock market is poised for a big bounce after it works through the current wave of banking turmoil, according to Fundstrat's global head of technical strategy Mark Newton. Though investors are still grappling with fears of a banking crisis, he reiterated his bullish view on stocks in an interview with CNBC on Monday. While the market could weather another tough four to six months if financial stocks don't see a sharp rebound soon, he forecasted the S&P 500 could hit 4,500 by year-end, implying a 13% jump from current levels.

"My thinking is we're going to have a pretty decent bounce in the next couple years before potentially we see a late-decade, potentially a pullback. I think that the recession potentially could be postponed. It probably can't be avoided completely, but for this year and next year I'm clearly in the no landing [camp]," Newton said.

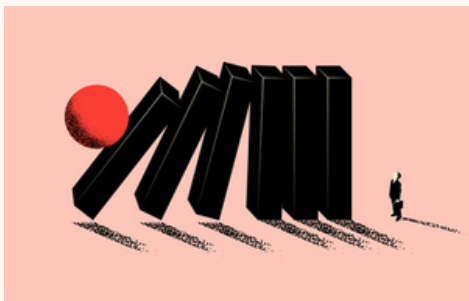
His view is contrary to other commentators, who say the recent collapse of Silicon Valley Bank has raised the odds of a recession this year. Banking troubles naturally slow down the economy, according to DataTrek co-founder Nicholas Colas, who told Insider he didn't see the US making it through the next 12 months without tipping into a downturn.

But Newton expects Fed officials to dial back interest rates in order to avoid putting pressure on the banking system. Lower rates are a "big positive" for stocks, while rising interest rates weighed down the S&P 500 heavily in 2022.

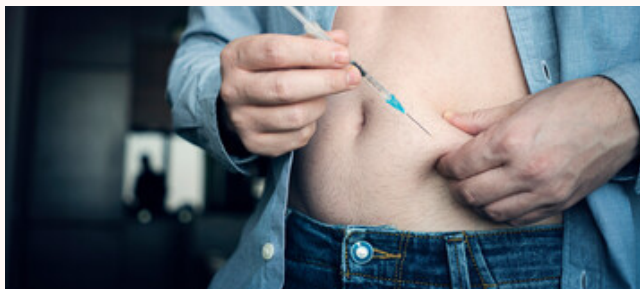
That momentum can already be seen in tech and growth stocks, with the tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite surging 13% from the start of the year as investors anticipate lower interest rates ahead.

If you see a broad-based rally in technology, yes, that does have the potential to carry markets higher or keep them resilient in the face of bad news, particularly when everyone is pessimistic," Newton added.

Central bankers are expected to deliver their next decision on Wednesday. Markets have priced in an 82% chance the Fed lifts rates by 25 basis points, and an 18% chance the Fed pauses its tightening cycle, according to the CME FedWatch tool.



# *Dangers of Taking Ozempic and Other Weight Loss Injections*



For years, we've heard about magical weight loss products that promise to melt off the pounds. Some are far-fetched, some are so dangerous that they're illegal, and some have made their way into the limelight – most recently, Ozempic and WeGovy. Originally intended to treat diabetes, these medications are now being prescribed, often via Telehealth, to people who want to lose weight. And it all started in Hollywood.

Variety reports that Ozempic and WeGovy have taken the industry by storm, and everyone, from reality stars to film producers to actors, has tried them. (Chelsea Handler said her doctor prescribed her Ozempic – without explaining what it was – in case she wanted to lose five pounds. Elon Musk tweeted that WeGovy helps him look fit and trim.) Since many health insurers refuse to cover the cost (around \$1,200 to \$1,500 monthly) for anyone who is not diabetic, only the rich can afford the injections. However, the average consumer should be far from envious of celebrities who can pay their way through weight loss – because these drugs have some potentially serious side.

## **How Ozempic and WeGovy Work**

Ozempic and WeGovy both have the same active ingredient: semaglutide. It comes as a solution that gets injected in the stomach once a week, and it works by stimulating the release of insulin. The drug also suppresses the secretion of glucagon (a hormone produced by the pancreas that increases blood glucose levels) – but only when blood glucose levels are already elevated. This mitigates the risk of hypoglycemia (very low blood sugar levels). Lastly, semaglutide slows down digestion, making the patient feel full for a longer period of time. All of this can translate into major weight loss.

## **Negative Side Effects of Semaglutide**

Though some users believe semaglutide is one of the best ways to jumpstart a healthy lifestyle, health experts caution that the drug has some serious side effects, listed below.

- Nausea, abdominal pain, constipation, heartburn, diarrhea, or vomiting
- Rash, itching, swelling of the eyes, face, mouth, tongue, throat, legs, ankles, or feet
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing
- Decreased urination
- Vision changes, fainting, or dizziness
- Rapid heartbeat
- You may gain some or all of the weight back when you stop taking the drug
- Your blood sugar may drop too far if you take this drug with other blood sugar-lowering medications

In addition, some semaglutide takers have developed serious kidney problems, including acute kidney injury. Symptoms of this include bloody urine, decreased urination, muscle twitching, nausea, rapid weight gain, and seizures. You should not take semaglutide if you have a history of thyroid cancer or pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas).

## **Bottom Line**

If you're curious about taking generic semaglutide, Ozempic, or WeGovy for weight loss, consult with your doctor – and not just a Telehealth doctor. There's a good chance it's more trouble than it's worth, depending on your health and the potential side effects. Additionally, the sudden popularity of the drug is making it difficult for people with severe diabetes to get their prescriptions fulfilled. (Though even some pre-diabetic and diabetic patients who have taken the drug report that it is not worth the risks.) Lastly, weight loss drugs reinforce the "thin is ideal" mentality – something that experts worry is harmful for people suffering with or recovering from eating disorders.

You are more than just a number on a scale – don't let Hollywood tell you otherwise.

# Top Expenses of Retirement That May Shock You



You may think that your big expenses in retirement will be for greens fees at golf clubs, spa charges at that resort in Crete, and taking the kids out for avocado toast on weekends. And that may well be true. But some of your biggest expenses may surprise you — because you pay them already. The combination of everyday expenses and extraordinary expenses are what people find difficult to balance in retirement.

“Lifestyle creep in retirement is a real thing,” says Nick Coveau, a certified financial planner in Costa Mesa, California. The spending that most folks rack up during their working years does not suddenly change in retirement, he says. Planning years in advance to try to maintain a reasonable style of living in retirement requires a keen sense of how much you’ll need to save and accumulate.

Here are the 10 top things for which retirees are most likely to dig into their portfolios:

## Health care

Of all the spending categories in your retirement, this one — over time — will likely be the big tamale. If you’re in reasonably good health, health care spending will typically be relatively low when you retire, then jump as you age into your 80s and beyond, says Eric Ross, a certified financial planner in Cincinnati. These expenses are often less for the husband, he says, because the husband typically dies first and sometimes relies on his spouse to take on many caregiving duties. That means the surviving spouse will often have to pay for their own caregiving costs, which tend to vary in different areas of the country.

At the same time, health care costs have seen — and will continue to see — faster inflation rates than any other spending category, says Craig Toberman, a certified financial planner in St. Louis. That’s why he projects that health care costs will climb about 5 percent annually over the next 30 years — about twice the rate of other expenses. He encourages clients to be mindful of their “lifestyle” retirement spending (like restaurant meals, travel and online shopping) in their 60s and 70s so that the money is still there to pay for increasing medical costs in their 80s and 90s.

## Home maintenance

If you plan to stay in your home through at least a good chunk of your retirement, you’ll likely see your home maintenance costs jump considerably, says Ross. That’s because you’ll probably have to hire services to take over some of the tasks you’ve been doing for years. This includes hiring pros to do everything from lawn mowing and gutter cleaning to window washing and home cleaning. “Something as simple as using a ladder as you age often isn’t a good idea,” he says.

## Travel

Travel costs in retirement will vary not only based on where you go and where you stay but on whom you bring along with you. Typically, you should plan to travel much more in early retirement and much less — to not at all — in the later years of retirement, says Toberman. That’s why, he suggests, folks who have set aside money for travel throughout their retirement but then cut back on trips due to health reasons might find a small “safety net” they can dip into for medical costs.

## Transportation

This is one of the most important areas of retirement spending but one of the least considered. As they age, retired folks often increasingly rely upon others to help them get from place to place.

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This might be an Uber ride to a doctor's appointment or a cab ride to the grocery store and back. Transportation will always be expensive. Even folks who purchase a new car before retirement will be faced with multiple transportation costs, ranging from payments on the car to maintenance to gasoline and insurance, says Bender. And if you choose to retire to a remote area, he says, your transportation costs will likely be that much higher — and you need to factor this in.

**Utilities**

Your utility costs are one of the few expenses that should head south in retirement. For one thing, you typically no longer have to pay for children taking long showers or cooking at all hours of the day and night, says Toberman. Also, folks tend to downsize their homes, which would require less heat and air conditioning, he says. Even then, the rates that utilities charge all customers will continue to increase annually. That's why Bender notes that installing solar panels with batteries can reduce rising electricity bills.

**Fitness and wellness**

It there's one area where financial planners agree retirees will get the most bang for their investment, this is it. People who invest in health and wellness typically have lower medical costs, says Ross. This can be anything from gym memberships to yoga classes to Peloton bikes to quality sneakers.

The more retirees spend on fitness and wellness, the less they spend on medical costs, says Toberman. He recommends that retirees allocate up to 10 percent of their total monthly spending for health and wellness, which he says can include anything from personal trainers to nutritional supplements to home exercise equipment.

**Kids and grandkids**

Spending on kids and grandkids can be as simple as a Starbucks gift certificate, as lavish as a trip to Disney World, or as lofty as a fat contribution to your grandkid's 529 college savings plan. In almost every case, it's going to be more than you think.

**Taxes**

Even though it seems like taxes might decline when you're retired, that's not always the case, says Toberman. The key, he says, is to try to plan for taxes before you retire. What's more, he says, as the federal government looks for ways to reduce the federal deficit, that will likely result in higher taxes.

It's wise for retirees to keep their retirement funds in IRAs, Roth IRAs and brokerage accounts so that they have the flexibility to respond by paying taxes each year in the most tax-efficient way

**Charitable giving**

Some folks who consistently give to charity when they're working tend to pull back from charitable giving once they retire, says Ross. Then, when they feel more secure in their retirement, they might pick up again and give more.

But others actually increase their charitable giving in retirement because with proper planning, after age 72, they can give directly to charities from IRAs on a pretax basis, which essentially allows them to give more.

**Professional help**

Then there are the pricey financial pros. These are the financial advisers, estate planning attorneys and accountants whose mission is to help retirees with their finances as they age. Yes, they are expensive, but it's critical to piece these relationships together well before you retire.

# How to Save Money on Your Groceries This Year



Saving money on groceries is a priority for many people, especially when prices rise due to inflation.

If you have multiple people in your household, the cost of groceries can be an even bigger concern. So, before you go grocery shopping, it's a good idea to write down your needs and identify ways you can reduce your bill.

## How much does the average person spend on groceries per week?

In the U.S., the average cost of weekly groceries ranges from \$35 to over \$100. That adds up to \$155 to more than \$400 per month, depending on various factors, including:

- Age
- Dietary restrictions
- Gender
- Geographic location
- Inflation
- Lifestyle
- Number of people in a household
- Type of food purchased

According to the Consumer Price Index, the following types of foods increased in price from December 2021 to December 2022:

- Cereals, bread, and baked goods (16.1%)
- Milk, cheese, and other dairy products (15.3%)
- Nonalcoholic beverages, like soda (12.6%)
- Fruits and vegetables (8.4%)

## How can I save money on groceries?

Depending on where you live and what types of foods you buy, groceries can have a major impact on your household budget. Here are eight ways you can save money during your next grocery visit.

### 1. Buy generic

Generic products are often packed in the same facility as their brand-name alternative. So, by buying generic, you can save money on groceries without sacrificing quality.

Sometimes, you can save as much as 20% to 30% by purchasing generic or store-brand food items. Some examples of items that often have a generic option are:

- Canned goods
- Frozen fruits
- Frozen vegetables
- Milk
- Olive oil
- Tomatoes

### 2. Buy in bulk

A family of four loses about \$1,500 a year on food they don't eat. Buying in bulk can save you money by reducing waste. And it ensures that you always have enough food on hand.

Buying bulk amounts of nonperishable foods that store well — like whole grains, canned or dried beans, and frozen vegetables — can be especially useful. Other steps you can take to make the most of bulk shopping are:

- Review your budget or shopping list to determine the items you buy often.
- Determine if you can save money by purchasing those items in bulk.
- Identify stores that offer bulk purchases at discounted prices.

### 3. Buy items on sale

Before you shop, be sure to check out grocery stores' weekly sales fliers. You can typically find these midweek:

- At store entrances
- In the newspaper
- On grocery company websites
- On social media

You can also clip coupons and take advantage of store specials for the things you buy often. Make sure you know how much your favorite items usually cost. This way, you'll know when you find a good deal.

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**CONTINUED****4. Check the price per unit**

When you're buying groceries, look at the price per unit of items, not just their overall price. You can find this listed on the sticker next to an item, under "unit price."

Often, an item with the lowest overall price is not the best deal. For example, a box of cereal that costs \$4 may not be a better buy than one that costs \$5. When you look at the price per unit, the \$4 box might come out to about 33 cents per ounce, while the \$5 box comes out to about 31 cents per ounce. If you choose the \$5 box, you will get more product at a cheaper price, even though the total cost is higher.

**5. Compare store prices**

Another way to save money on groceries is to compare prices for items at different stores. If you want to buy golden berries, for example, you can do this by checking online ads for different stores before you shop.

There are also price-check apps that can alert you when grocery prices drop at different stores. These apps help you compare prices across retailers to find the best deals. You can try popular options like Flipp, ShopSavvy, and Price Cruncher, or some grocery store chains even have their own apps with similar features.

Doing this simple step of comparing prices can help you avoid overpaying for groceries and stretch your budget further.

**6. Download store apps**

Downloading grocery shopping apps can also help you save money. Some of the different ways these apps can help you save money on groceries are:

- Alerting you to rebates on specific products
- Offering cash back on purchases made through the app
- Offering exclusive discounts on specific products at specific stores
- Providing digital coupons for groceries
- Compiling a list of local weekly ads and coupons from retailers to help you find the best deals

**7. Join a loyalty program**

A loyalty program is an incentive strategy that stores use to keep customers coming back. These rewards are a way for stores to say thank you for being a good customer.

When you join a store's loyalty program, you can earn rewards or discounts for shopping there. For example, you might get a coupon for a discount on your next purchase or earn points for every dollar you spend.

**8. Use credit cards that offer cash back at grocery stores**

Many credit cards offer rewards or cash back on grocery purchases. And some cards offer bonus rewards or cash back when you buy specific items.

To maximize savings, it's a good idea to use a credit card that offers rewards that match your spending habits. But be sure you can pay off your balance in full each month to avoid interest charges.

**What items should I buy if I'm grocery shopping on a budget?**

When shopping on a budget, consider buying the following items:

- Canned goods
- Cereals
- Chicken and turkey
- Eggs
- Frozen fruits and vegetables
- Ground beef
- Low-fat dairy
- Rice, beans, and pasta
- Whole grains

**The bottom line**

Saving money on groceries can play an essential part in your family's monthly budget. And there are many ways to reduce your grocery costs, such as buying generic items, checking the price per unit of items, and comparing prices at different stores.

You can also earn rewards and discounts by joining loyalty programs and downloading shopping apps. By using some of these strategies, you can reduce your grocery bill and have more money for other household expenses.

## The New Sophisticated Job Scam



Consumer protection experts are warning about a sophisticated job scam aimed at getting Social Security and bank account information from job seekers. Unlike the job scams of yesteryear that were pretty easy to spot, the latest job scam uses job applicant information to lure unsuspecting consumers into letting down their guard.

"Job scams have really picked up," says Melanie McGovern, spokeswoman for the International Association of Better Business Bureaus. "A lot of it has to do with a lot of people getting laid off and also people looking for a fully remote position."

### Sophisticated job scam

According to the Better Business Bureau, the latest sophisticated job scam starts when someone applies for positions on real job sites, such as Monster, ZipRecruiter and others. Job scammers apparently pepper these sites with advertisements offering high-paying remote positions. They sometimes also buy lists of potential job seekers and pose as representatives of real companies, such as Amazon, Walmart and Intuit.

Days or weeks after you frequent a job site or submit applications, you're likely to get a text message asking whether you're still interested in the job. Given that you've provided this contact information, applicants say the messages don't seem unusual.

If you reply to the text message, the scammer is likely to ask you to download a messaging app to answer questions via text. Otherwise, the scammer may offer to interview you over Zoom or Google meet. However, mostly, the scammer does not show him or herself to you. They may use a photo or an icon to represent themselves on video conferences.

All too quickly, this faux employer will hire you — sometimes even sending a convincing offer letter.

### Costly con

That's when the costly part of this con swings into action. Like real employers, the con artist will tell you that you'll be paid via direct deposit. However, you'll need to provide bank information as well as your Social Security number. With this information, the con artists can drain your bank account and steal your identity, opening new credit in your name.

Some also offer to set you up in a home office. The catch? You'll either need to pay for "postage" to get your new office equipment, or they'll send you a check to buy your own.

### Warning signs

No matter how sophisticated, there are usually a handful of warning signs of a job scam, says McGovern. First, if the interview process is too easy and the pay is unusually high, those are both red flags, she says. Moreover, real employers give applicants plenty of time to consider job offers. Any employer that pressures you to make a quick decision about the job most likely has something to hide. "Now or never" offers are almost always cons, McGovern says.

Additionally, know that you should never have to pay for anything upfront. It doesn't matter if it's postage; application fees; your own office equipment. Paying upfront to take a job is a classic warning sign. Real companies pay the full cost of getting you necessary equipment and they will never send you a check for more than the cost of your office supplies and ask you to "reimburse them."

### Avoiding job scams

However, because the scams appear to get more sophisticated every day, there are a few things job applicants should do before they hand over any privy information to a potential employer.

- Research
- Open a new door
- Google
- Enlist help

Oftentimes, when things appear to good to be true, that is usually because they are. Take warning and protect yourselves!

## *Start Your Very Own Garden This Spring*



Starting a garden with little or no planning can be intimidating. I used to be apprehensive about gardening myself, but now I laugh at my past self with all the reservations and doubts. Maybe the idea to grow your own plants suddenly just occurred to you. But to grow a garden full of plants will take planning and a bit of looking into the basics of plants and gardening.

### **Start With Easy-To-Grow Plants**

For ornamental plants, those that are native to your area will be the most foolproof plants to grow. When starting a flower garden, it's best you get acquainted with annual flowers and perennial flowers.

Look into plants that don't require watering and need minimal fertilization. They take away a lot of work, which new gardeners will appreciate. They are also eco-friendly, as they do not take as many resources to maintain!

Growing vegetables is also a great idea. They do require a bit more care than, say, a cactus, but it's incredibly satisfying to cook up a plate of sustenance you raised from seedlings by your own hands. Check out a list of the easiest vegetables for beginner gardeners to grow.

### **Get Basic Gardening Tools**

Looking into gardening tools will lead you to such a large selection, you'll be overwhelmed. But truthfully, you only need an essential handful at most to start your garden, specifically during springtime. A fork and trowel, garden gloves, watering can, cutting or pruning shears, a shovel, and a sun hat are basics most gardeners swear by. You can add a few more as you continue to enjoy gardening.

### **How to Start a Garden**

#### **Step 1: Soil Preparation**

Along with water and sunlight, the soil is important in growing healthy plants. Soil which has been neglected for long will need cultivating to loosen it up, let air in, and improve water retention and drainage.

Although there are ornamental plants that are drought-tolerant, most vegetables will depend on healthy soil to be productive. You'll find it out as you grow a vegetable garden. You'll appreciate compost so much, you might consider making your own.

#### **Step 2: Planting a Garden**

You can grow plants either from seeds or vegetative means. This means growing new plants from a branch cutting or root part. As a beginner, growing plants from seeds is the easiest and simplest. You'll also learn by and by that, you can start seeds indoors or in pots which you can later transplant. To start a garden, try growing tomatoes from seeds planted directly on the ground then throw in marigold seeds as a companion. Again, remember to consider the season because not all plants can grow all year round.

#### **Step 3: Caring for Your Plants**

Caring for your plants is basically making sure the plants are watered and kept off from weeds and pests. It's best to water your plants (depending on their moisture requirement) in the morning before the sun rises and in the afternoon after the sun has set. Mulching your plants, especially vegetables, will help keep weeds off and keep the soil moisturized.

The best thing about starting a garden during spring, it's not as complicated to care for your plants.



## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

As a nonprofit consumer education organization, ACC has developed partnerships with credit unions across the country. These partnerships allow ACC members eligibility with our credit unions. If approved, our members gain access to a member-owned financial institution, with products and services designed to make banking more affordable, simple and convenient, and to offer additional resources that can help our members identify and achieve their financial dreams.

Grow Financial Federal Credit Union  
P.O. Box 89909  
Tampa, FL 33689-0415

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**We serve people,  
not profit.®**

Serving people over profit goes beyond finances for us. From everyday banking to financial literacy education to community initiatives, we're here for you. We exist to make things grow – people, communities, money and dreams.

Grow is different. We're not a bank. We're a credit union, which means we're a not-for-profit owned by our members. You might ask, "are credit unions safe?" Absolutely. We are insured by the NCUA, keeping your money safe and secure. Instead of being obligated to increase profits for stockholders, we're dedicated to serving members. That shows in everything we do – like in the rates we can offer, the service we provide when you're buying a home or the help we give when you're saving for retirement.

### How to Become A Grow Member

Managing your finances shouldn't be intimidating, which is why we've made becoming a Grow member accessible and easy. All it takes is just a \$1 initial deposit to open a Basic Savings Account, instantly making you a Grow member.<sup>1</sup>

When you open a Basic Savings Account, we invest our profits in you, helping you enjoy today while saving for tomorrow. That means you can still enjoy your favorite cup of coffee or craft beer while saving for life's next adventure.

### Credit Unions vs. Banks

We've put together this video to help you understand the difference between a credit union and a bank. Spoiler: the key difference is, we put people over profit. Become a member today by opening a Basic Savings Account, and start enjoying all the benefits our credit union has to offer



### About Grow

Ever since we were founded in 1955, Grow has been more about people than profit. Since banks back then didn't really understand how to work with service members, a group of civilian employees at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa decided base personnel needed their own credit union. These employees cleared out a broom closet, and the MacDill Air Force Base Federal Credit Union was born. The next couple of decades were a boom time for the Sunbelt, and our credit union welcomed all kinds of people, not just military personnel. As we grew with the community, we became Grow. The name reflected the essence of who we are and what we set out to do – help people grow. Personally. Professionally. Financially. And after 60 years, we're just getting started.

At Grow, we do more than provide financial services to our members. Our employees and members rely on one another to improve the quality of life for us all. The Grow Financial Foundation was established to support these efforts by providing funds and volunteers for local causes. It's a private, non-profit organization, with 100% of its funds donated to organizations working in alignment with its mission to facilitate the charitable and community involvement of the Credit Union and its team members. We are focused on the fulfillment of purpose-driven work in the areas of workforce development, affordable housing, serving the unbanked and underbanked, financial literacy, and promoting other community organizations with similar purposes.

### We Can Help Keep Your Business Moving

Beyond everyday business banking and lending, we've got additional solutions to keep your business moving. It's a no-brainer that we offer convenient night deposit, notary services, cashier's checks and business wire transfers. We've also got merchant services like payment processing solutions, exclusive discounts on payroll management services and an insurance one-stop shop to help you protect your business.

For more information, please visit our website at [www.growfinancial.org](http://www.growfinancial.org) or call us at [800.839.6328](tel:800.839.6328).

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New England Federal Credit Union  
141 Harvest Lane, PO Box 527  
Williston, VT 05495-0527

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### We Are a Partner in Your Financial Life

At NEFCU, we're in the business of empowering our members to make good financial decisions so you can improve your overall quality of life. We offer solutions that are tailored to your needs and appropriate to your circumstances. We provide our members with a full range of financial products and services, with very competitive rates, fewer fees and unparalleled levels of convenience.

We understand that a local, Vermont-based financial institution can only be as strong as the communities which it serves. Therefore, we are actively engaged in community events and programs that help to improve the overall quality of life here. To learn more about our community involvement, see our Facebook page. To request financial or other support, please see our charitable giving guidelines.

Our dedication to a higher standard of service and the value in our products help us to consistently exceed NEFCU members' expectations.

### Financial Education at Your Fingertips

At NEFCU we support you in achieving your financial goals. NEFCU's Financial Education Program includes a variety of resources, events, and tools to help grow your confidence as you manage your money. Topics include:

- Managing Debt
- Short & Long-Term Saving Goals
- Home Buying & Mortgages
- Retirement & Investing
- and more...

Browse information from NEFCU, Zogo, and Enrich. Zogo and Enrich are select partners that offer additional resources and information for our members in interactive context.

**Financial Counseling** Every day, our Certified Financial Counselors help people make positive financial changes. This free and confidential service is available to all NEFCU members. It is designed to help you strengthen your financial situation.



We help you master the fundamentals of your finances, so you have more control over your money and can put it to work for you. We offer the following services.

#### **Budget Counseling**

We'll look at your cash flow and set up a budget and spending plan targeted toward specific financial goals.

#### **Credit Counseling**

We'll review your credit report in detail and make a plan to improve your credit score.

#### **Debt Counseling**

We'll look at all of your debts and identify opportunities to restructure them to help you reach your goals faster.

For more information on the plethora of services that we offer, please visit our website at [www.nefcu.com](http://www.nefcu.com) or call us at [802.879.8790](tel:802.879.8790).

# ACC Wrap Up

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



## Green C Certification

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for ACC's **"Green C" Certification**.

Applications for the **Summer** cycle are now being accepted through **September 5th**.

It's a proven fact that consumers prefer to do business with eco-friendly companies, implement green initiatives and that practice Corporate Social Responsibility. The process is straight-forward, and all applicants are recognized by the ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants should review the criteria, then complete and submit their applications to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the Green C Certification criteria can be viewed online at [bit.ly/3d45Con](https://bit.ly/3d45Con).

For more information, call 1-800-544-0414 or visit ACC's website [here](#).



## Friend of the Consumer

Is your business consumer-friendly?

Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers?

If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award.



Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" awards to deserving manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States, and which meet or exceed federally mandated standards, and have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing products or services that foster consumer confidence and market acceptance."

To apply, complete the online application at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp](https://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp) and return it to ACC with the application fee.

Applicants will be notified within five days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of your submission.



## Financial Education

ACC is honored to have a partnership with Nicole Middendorf. Nicole is a money maven, a knowledge junkie, and a born coach. She is an entrepreneur who left Morgan Stanley in 2003 to run her own wealth management firm. Nicole is the author of five books, a world traveler, philanthropist, and an accomplished public speaker.

As a Wealth Advisor and Certified Divorce Financial Analyst with Prosperwell Financial, her main focus is to help people create wealth from the inside out. She is able to accomplish this through one-on-one client meetings, writing books, presenting at conferences, and appearing on TV, radio, and other media.

Nicole shares financial advice and a real-life perspective on saving, planning, and investing with audiences across the country. Her primary goal is to take complicated subjects and make them easy to understand. She works hard to empower her audience to make crucial and positive changes in their own lives. Nicole's books have received local and national press coverage, where she has become known for her thoughtful concise quotes, relaxed on-air presence, and articulate delivery.

ACC is committed to promoting and providing financial education to the public. Nicole Middendorf has collaborated with us to create a new 6-part video series that promotes financial literacy for youth. Check it out here: <https://qcashfinancial.com/are-we-failing-our-kids-in-financial-literacy/>

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