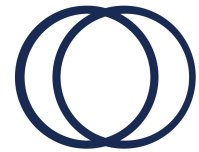




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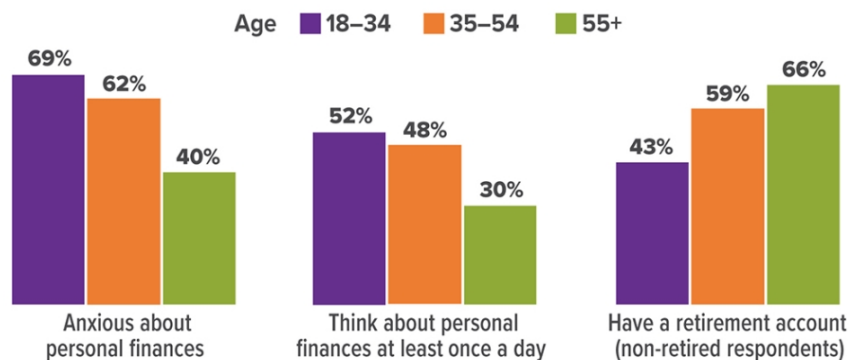
Percentage of Americans who said they spent more than their income in 2021; 34% said they spent about equal to their income, and 43% said they spent less. These responses were almost exactly the same as in 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018 — suggesting that people are spenders or savers regardless of economic conditions.

Source: FINRA Investor Education Foundation, 2022

Anxious About Your Finances?

A study of financial capability found that older Americans were significantly less anxious about personal finances than younger people. However, about one-third of non-retired people 55 and older had no retirement account.

A comparison of the percentages regarding financial anxiety and retirement accounts suggests that having sufficient resources to contribute to a retirement account is an important aspect of feeling less financial stress for older people. However, many younger people feel stress regardless of whether they have retirement savings. This is especially true of those ages 35 to 54 who may have large mortgages, children in college, and other financial stressors.



Source: FINRA Investor Education Foundation, 2022 (2021 data)

Why Buy Life Insurance During Unsettled Economic Times?

To say the economy has been uneven over the past few years is an understatement. Amid these bumpy economic times, why buy life insurance? Here are a few reasons.

Protection for Loved Ones

Savings that were intended to provide support for you and your family may have taken a hit over the past few years due to stock market volatility. If you die, life insurance can be used to replace some of the savings you may have lost during these turbulent economic times. The tax-free death benefit could be used to provide income to your spouse and family, pay off mortgages and loans, meet tax liabilities, or pay for college expenses.

May Help Diversify Your Portfolio

Certain types of permanent life insurance have a cash value option that can be beneficial during times of economic uncertainty. Some policies offer minimum interest rate guarantees (subject to the financial strength and claims-paying ability of the issuer), that may offer an alternative to the unpredictability of the stock market.

Offers an Additional Way to Accumulate Wealth

Cash value life insurance allows all interest and earnings on the policy's accumulations to grow tax deferred. You may be able to take withdrawals from the cash accumulation of the life insurance policy. Any withdrawal you make will typically be tax-free up to your basis (i.e., premiums paid) in the policy. Because any earnings grow tax deferred while inside the policy, they will be subject to income tax when you withdraw them. Withdrawals coming out of your policy are generally treated as basis first. Be aware that surrender charges may also apply when you withdraw from your policy, even if you withdraw only up to your basis. One way to avoid this and still access your money is to take a policy loan from the insurance company, using the cash value in the policy as collateral. The amount you borrow is generally not treated as taxable income as long as you repay the loan, and there are no surrender charges because you're not actually withdrawing your money. But you'll have to pay interest on the loan, which is not tax deductible.

Provides Protection in the Form of Living Benefits

Life insurance may help replace lost funds should you become disabled, need long-term care, or face a terminal illness. For example, if you are terminally ill,

you may be able to receive a portion of the death proceeds from your life insurance before you die in order to pay necessary expenses. Some life insurance policies include a special rider that allows you to accelerate your life insurance death benefit if you need long-term care during your life. Certain riders can be added to a life insurance policy and may help in the event you become disabled and unable to work.

Comparison of Types of Cash Value Life Insurance



	Whole Life	Variable Life	Universal Life	Variable Universal Life
Earnings grow tax deferred	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cash value may be withdrawn tax-free	Within limits	No	Within limits	Within limits
Policy loans allowed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Policy loan proceeds received tax-free (Note: Special tax rules apply if policy is later cancelled)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cash value growth guaranteed by insurance company	Yes	No	Yes	No

Optional benefit riders are available for an additional fee and are subject to contractual terms, conditions and limitations as outlined in the policy and may not benefit all investors. Any payments used for covered long-term care expenses would reduce (and are limited to) the death benefit or annuity value and can be much less than those of a typical long-term care policy. As with most financial decisions, there are expenses associated with the purchase of life insurance. Policies commonly have mortality and expense charges. The cost and availability of life insurance depend on factors such as age, health, and the type and amount of insurance purchased. Any guarantees are subject to the financial strength and claims-paying ability of the insurance issuer. The investment return and principal value of the variable investment options will fluctuate and are not guaranteed. Loans and withdrawals from a permanent life insurance policy will reduce the policy's cash value and death benefit, could increase the chance that the policy will lapse, and might result in a tax liability if the policy terminates before the death of the insured. Additional out-of-pocket payments may be needed if actual dividends or investment returns decrease, if you withdraw policy cash values, or if current charges increase.

SECURE 2.0 Act Expands Early Withdrawal Exceptions

Tax-advantaged retirement accounts such as 401(k) plans and IRAs are intended to promote long-term retirement savings and thus offer preferential tax treatment in return for a commitment to keep savings in the account until at least age 59½. Withdrawals before that age may be subject to a 10% federal income tax penalty on top of ordinary income tax. However, there is a long list of exceptions to this penalty, including several new ones added by the SECURE 2.0 Act of 2022.

Before considering these exceptions, keep in mind that the greatest penalty for early withdrawal from retirement savings could be the loss of future earnings on those savings (see chart). Even so, there are times when tapping retirement savings might be necessary.

Some employer plans allow loans that may be a better solution than an early withdrawal. If a loan or other resources are not available, these exceptions could help. They apply to both employer-sponsored plans and IRAs unless otherwise indicated.

New Exceptions

The SECURE 2.0 Act added the following exceptions to the 10% early withdrawal penalty. Withdrawals covered by these exceptions can be repaid within three years. If the repayment is made after the year of the distribution, an amended return would have to be filed to obtain a refund of any taxes paid.

- **Disaster relief** — up to \$22,000 for expenses related to a federally declared disaster; distributions can be included in gross income equally over three years (effective for disasters on or after January 26, 2021)
- **Terminal illness** — defined as a condition that will cause death within seven years as certified by a physician (effective 2023)
- **Emergency expenses** — one distribution of up to \$1,000 per calendar year for personal or family emergency expenses; no further emergency distributions allowed during three-year repayment period unless funds are repaid or new contributions are at least equal to the withdrawal (effective 2024)
- **Domestic abuse** — the lesser of \$10,000 (indexed for inflation) or 50% of the account value for an account holder who certifies that he or she has been the victim of domestic abuse during the preceding one-year period (effective 2024)

Exceptions Already in Place

These exceptions to the 10% early withdrawal penalty were in effect prior to the SECURE 2.0 Act. They cannot be repaid unless indicated.

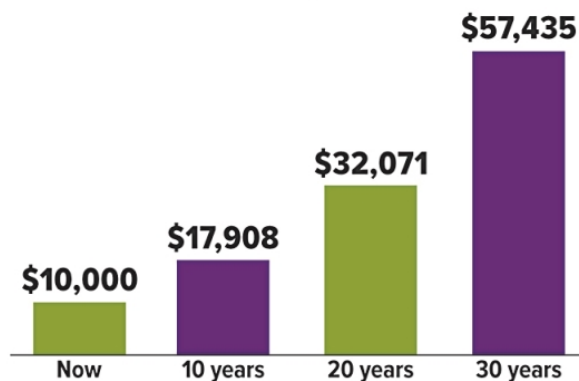
- Death or permanent disability of the account owner
- A series of substantially equal periodic payments for the life of the account holder or the joint lives of the account holder and designated beneficiary

- Unreimbursed medical expenses that exceed 7.5% of adjusted gross income
- Up to \$5,000 for expenses related to the birth or adoption of a child; can be repaid within three years
- Distributions taken by an account holder on active military reserve duty; can be repaid up to two years after end of active duty
- Distributions due to an IRS levy on the account
- (IRA only) Up to \$10,000 lifetime for a first-time homebuyer to buy, build, or improve a home
- (IRA only) Health insurance premiums if unemployed
- (IRA only) Qualified higher education expenses

Lost Opportunity

An early retirement plan withdrawal could end up costing more than you might imagine, even without the 10% penalty. Income taxes will reduce the present value of the withdrawal, and you will lose the potential long-term growth on the amount withdrawn.

Potential lost growth on a \$10,000 withdrawal, assuming 6% annual return



This hypothetical example is used for illustrative purposes only and does not represent the performance of any specific investment. Fees and expenses are not considered and would reduce the performance shown if they were included. Rates of return will vary over time, particularly for long-term investments. Actual results will vary.

Special Exceptions for Employer Accounts

The 10% penalty does not apply for distributions from an employer plan to an employee who leaves a job after age 55, or age 50 for qualified public safety employees. SECURE 2.0 extended the exception to public safety officers with at least 25 years of service with the employer sponsoring the plan, regardless of age, as well as to state and local corrections officers and private-sector firefighters.

Retirement account withdrawals can have complex tax consequences. Consult your tax professional before taking specific action.

Cheaper Hearing Aids Are Coming to a Store Near You

More than 37 million U.S. adults are living with some hearing loss, but only about one-fourth of those who might benefit from a hearing aid have used one.¹ Cost is a big obstacle: The average price of a pair of prescription hearing aids runs about \$4,600.

Traditional Medicare and most health insurers cover routine hearing tests but not the cost of hearing aids, although some private Medicare Advantage plans may help cover them. But thanks to a recent regulatory shift, it's now possible to buy an effective hearing aid without a medical exam or a prescription, potentially for a lot less money.²

In an effort to spur competition and lower prices, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released final rules for a new category of over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids specifically for adults with mild to moderate hearing loss. These OTC hearing aids are designed to be self-fitting, and they cost less, partly because they don't require the services of an audiologist to evaluate the person's hearing and fit or tune the device. Consumers who purchase OTC hearing aids should be able to set them up by themselves or with technical support provided by manufacturers through apps or over the phone.

Well-known manufacturers are rolling out an assortment of OTC hearing aids, many of them costing as little as \$200 to \$500 per ear. Some wrap around the ear like traditional hearing aids, but others look more like ear buds or are nearly invisible. They are

already available at many stores where health-care devices are sold, or online, but this brand-new market should continue to expand over time. Hearing loss is often progressive, and research shows that people wait an average of 10 years before buying a hearing aid.³ Thus, there is some hope that easy access to more affordable — and less conspicuous — options could encourage more people who have trouble hearing to seek help sooner.

Tips for Consumers

OTC hearing aids must be clearly labeled as FDA approved, which should help shoppers distinguish them from unregulated personal devices that may amplify sound but don't correct other issues, such as distortion. Consumers are advised to ask about the retailer's return policy in case they are disappointed with the performance of their new hearing aid.

Individuals with severe or sudden hearing loss, as well as those who experience ear pain, vertigo, or tinnitus, should consult an audiologist for testing and treatment. Some people with mild to moderate hearing loss may still want to have their hearing tested by an audiologist, who might be able to help identify OTC hearing aids that may work well for their specific condition.

1) National Institutes of Health, 2022

2-3) National Council on Aging, 2022

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