

End-of-the-Year Money Moves

Some things you might consider before saying goodbye to 2019



What has changed for you in 2019? Did you start a new job or leave a job behind? Did you retire? Did you start a family? If notable changes occurred in your personal or professional life, then you will want to review your finances before this year ends and 2020 begins.

Even if your 2019 has been relatively uneventful, the end of the year is still a good time to get cracking and see where you can manage your tax bill and/or build a little more wealth.

Keep in mind this article is for informational purposes only and is not a replacement for real-life advice. Please consult your tax, legal and accounting professionals before modifying your tax strategy.

Do you practice tax-loss harvesting? That is the art of taking capital losses (selling securities worth less than what you first paid for them) to offset your short-term capital gains. You might want to consider this move, which may lower your taxable income. It should be made with the guidance of a financial professional you trust.¹

In fact, you could even take it a step further. Consider that up to \$3,000 of capital losses in excess of capital gains can be deducted from ordinary income, and any remaining capital losses above that can be carried forward to offset capital gains in upcoming years. When you live in a high-tax state, this is one way to defer tax.¹

Do you want to itemize deductions? You may just want to take the standard deduction for 2019, which has ballooned to \$12,200 for single filers and \$24,400 for joint filers because of the Tax Cuts & Jobs Act. If you do think it might be better for you to itemize, now would be a good time to get the receipts and assorted paperwork together. While many miscellaneous deductions have disappeared, some key deductions are still around: the state and local tax (SALT) deduction, now capped at \$10,000; the mortgage interest deduction; the deduction for charitable contributions, which now has a higher limit of 60% of adjusted gross income; and the medical expense deduction.^{2,3}

Could you ramp up 401(k) or 403(b) contributions? Contribution to these retirement plans may lower your yearly gross income. If you lower your gross income enough, you might be able to qualify for other tax credits or breaks available to those under certain income limits. Note that contributions to Roth 401(k)s and Roth 403(b)s are made with after-tax rather than pre-tax dollars, so contributions to those accounts are not deductible and will not lower your taxable income for the year.^{4,5}

Are you thinking of gifting? How about donating to a qualified charity or non-profit organization before 2019 ends? Your gift may qualify as a tax deduction. You must itemize deductions using Schedule A to claim a deduction for a charitable gift.^{4,5}

While we're on the topic of estate strategy, why not take a moment to review your beneficiary designations? If you haven't reviewed them for a decade or more (which is all too common), double-check to see that these assets will go where you want them to go, should you pass away. Lastly, look at your will to see that it remains valid and up-to-date.

Can you take advantage of the American Opportunity Tax Credit? The AOTC allows individuals whose modified adjusted gross income is \$80,000 or less (and joint filers with MAGI of \$160,000 or less) a chance to claim a credit of up to \$2,500 for qualified college expenses. Phase-outs kick in above those MAGI levels.⁶

See that you have withheld the right amount. If you discover that you have withheld too little on your W-4 form so far, you may need to adjust your withholding before the year ends.

What can you do before ringing in the New Year? Talk with us now rather than in February or March. Little year-end moves might help you improve your short-term and long-term financial situation.

Have a great weekend!

Source: MarketingPro, Inc.

Golf Tip of the Week



Be Aware of the Fake Turn

As we get older, we might lose flexibility in our shoulders and back, and it becomes harder to do a full turn in our swing. But this is an important movement to generate power, so make sure you continue to power your swing with a full turn, not a fake turn.

A fake turn might look good as your arms become parallel to the ground, but it's all in the arms. Instead, make sure to do a full shoulder turn and power your rotation with your torso as well. Keep your arms away from your head and rotate with as much arm length as possible. Allow your arms and shoulders to start the takeaway, but then let your pelvis rotate away from the ball to complete your backswing. Think of your golf swing as a circle. A full turn allows you to rotate away from the ball on a single axis and come back down on the ball with an equal amount of power. Don't fake it until you make it!

Tip adapted from Golf Digest Schoolsⁱ

Recipe of the Week

Cider-Braised Chicken Thighs



This healthy fall recipe is perfect for those cool nights at home. It incorporates some of the season's freshest produce and has a delightfully tart taste from the cider and apples.

[4 servings]

Ingredients:

- 4 slices of turkey bacon
- 8 bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- 2 red apples, sliced
- 1 12-oz bottle of hard cider
- 2 Tbsp. of thyme
- 2 Tbsp. of mustard seed
- Salt
- 2 cups Brussels sprouts, halved

Directions:

1. Cook the turkey bacon in a skillet until crisp. Set aside.
2. Cook the chicken thighs, skin-side down, for about 10 minutes or until browned.
3. Add the apples to the skillet, then cook for about 4 minutes or until brown on both sides.
4. Add the cider, thyme, mustard, Brussels sprouts, and salt to the skillet and bring to a boil.
5. Return the chicken to the skillet and simmer on low for about 10 minutes. Add the apples and bacon and cook another 3 minutes.
6. To serve, divide the chicken thighs and pour any extra cider mixture on top.

Recipe adapted from Midwest Livingⁱⁱ

Health Tip of the Week



October Is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

We all know someone in our lives who has been affected by cancer. A parent, a friend, a sibling, or maybe even us. This year alone, over 300,000 women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer. Based on current statistics, a woman has a 12.8% risk of developing breast cancer during her lifetime, and while most individuals diagnosed are women, men make up an estimated 1% of all cases.

Even though there are many uncontrollable circumstances associated with an increased risk of breast cancer, including age, sex, family history, and genetic predisposition, among others, certain lifestyle-related factors are within your control – and they could decrease your risk. Some of these include:

- Limiting alcohol consumption to fewer than one drink daily
- Abstaining from smoking cigarettes and other tobacco-containing products
- Eating a well-balanced diet with a variety of nutritious foods
- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- Engaging in frequent aerobic and weight-bearing physical activity
- Limiting dose and duration of hormone replacement therapy
- Avoiding exposure to excessive radiation and environmental contamination
- Breastfeeding, if possible and desired

Above all else, regular screenings and exams, upon your medical provider's recommendations, may help to detect, diagnose, and treat breast cancer in its earlier stages. And research supports that taking proactive and preventative measures is associated with better outcomes.

Tip adapted from BreastCancer.org, National Cancer Institute^{iii, iv, v}

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ⁱ <https://www.golfdigest.com/story/sean-foley-dont-fake-turn>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.midwestliving.com/recipe/cider-braised-chicken-brussels-sprouts-and-apples/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors>

^{iv} <https://www.cancer.gov/types/breast/risk-fact-sheet>

^v <https://www.breastcancer.org/symptoms/testing/types>