

What to Carry in your Wallet and Purse

by Ruth D. Bernstein

Real Simple Magazine recently published an article online about “[How to De-Clutter Your Wallet](#)” which appeared originally on [LearnVest.com](#). As I read the article, I realized that I carry too much stuff and leave myself open for a lot of headaches caused by identity theft and loss of valuable things. According to the article, 1,000 wallets and purses are stolen every *two minutes* in America! The article suggested items to leave at home including your Social Security and Medicare Card, checkbook, passport, more than \$50 in cash, more than two or three credit cards, a non-password protected phone, gift cards, store receipts and jewelry.

Your Social Security number is the key to your life. A thief can use it to open credit card accounts, take out loans or buy a car. The problem is our Social Security numbers appear on our Medicare Cards. Here's what an article on [eldercareabcblog.com](#) has to say on that subject:

“Did you know that one of the easiest ways for your identity to be stolen is if you lose your Medicare card? Everyone receives their Medicare card when they turn 65 years old. But, your Medicare number is tied directly to your social security number – something identity thieves just love.

First thing you need to do is to keep your Medicare card in a safe place. It is recommended that you do not carry your card with you. What if you should lose your wallet? There's your social security number. All it takes is one identity thief. Instead, make a copy of the card and blackout the last 4 digits of the number and keep that with you. This just shows someone that you are covered by Medicare should you need any type of medical help. What you should do is make a few extra copies of your card and keep those copies in a safe place too. Now should you need to visit a doctor, you can just hand them the copy of your Medicare number. You don't have to hand them your original card and forget to get it back. Also, you are not carrying your original card with you. Identity theft is on the rise and senior and elderly populations seem to be a prime target for the thieves.”

Credit Cards and Bank Cards – The more cards you carry the more trouble you will be in if your wallet is stolen because thieves can use them to rack up huge charges. Only carry the one or two cards you really need and leave the rest of them at home.

Your Passport – Your passport can also be used for identity theft. Leave it in a safe place at home. If you are traveling, leave the passport in the hotel safe and carry a photocopy with you.

Make photo copies of the front and back of your driver's license, Social Security and Medicare cards, your bank cards, all your credit cards and your passport. Store these copies in a safe, preferably a locked place and let your family know where this information is.

Your Check Book - If you need a check, note the date and what you will be using it for in your checkbook and then take it out of the book. Write in the amount when you get home. Your check book has your bank account number and address. In the wrong hands, blank checks can be easily cashed.

Cash – Only carry as much cash as you are willing to lose. You should always have some cash in case of emergency but should not carry more than \$50 unless you know you are going to need the money that day to shop.

Smart Phones - Use a password protected cell phone to safeguard all the important financial information you have on it. That way thieves can't steal it.

Gift Cards/Certificates – Gift Cards are just like cash. If found in your wallet they can be used immediately. If you can, use them on the stores web site. If not , leave them at home unless you know you are going to that store.

Receipts - Store receipts have credit card information and your signature. Take them out of your wallet/purse everyday and store them in a safe place. Make sure you check your credit card bill every month against the receipts and report any unknown charges to the company immediately.

Jewelry – If you are going out to a dressy affair and put your jewelry in your purse before and after the event to keep it safe, make sure to put it back where it belongs when you get home.

Once you have cleaned out your wallet, in addition to a card showing your emergency contact and health information, put some family photos, preferably baby photos in it. According to a study done in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2009, wallets with baby photos in them have the highest rate of return. I'm going to dig out my twenty year old grandchildren's baby pictures and put them in my wallet!