



Consumer News & Views

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



In This Issue

LOWER INTEREST RATES HELP P2
.....

MINDFULNESS ANTIDEPRESSANT P4
.....

WINTERIZE HOME SAVE \$ P6
.....

DECORATING SAFETY TIPS P8
.....

CLIMATE CHANGE & HURRICANES P10
.....

SIGNS OF VITAMIN C DEFICIENCY P12
.....

CREDIT HUMAN P15
.....

EASTRISE CREDIT UNION P16
.....

EP FED. CREDIT UNION P17
.....

ACC WRAP-UP P18

Consumer Confidence Increases in November



The Conference Board Consumer Confidence Index® increased in November to 111.7 (1985=100), up 2.1 points from 109.6 in October.

U.S. consumers' confidence recorded improvement in November and reached the top of the range that has prevailed over the past two years.

- The increase in confidence was mainly driven by more positive consumer assessments of the present situation, particularly regarding the labor market.
- Among age groups, November's gains were led by a large jump in confidence for consumers under 35 years old.
- Compared to October, consumers were substantially more optimistic about future job availability, which reached its highest level in almost three years.
- All income groups reported higher confidence except those at the very top (earning over \$125K) and bottom (earning less than \$15K).
- The proportion of consumers anticipating a recession over the next 12 months fell further in November--the lowest since July 2022.

The Present Situation Index—based on consumers' assessment of current business and labor market conditions—increased by 4.8 points to 140.9.

The Expectations Index—based on consumers' short-term outlook for income, business, and labor market conditions—ticked up 0.4 points to 92.3, well above the threshold of 80 that usually signals a recession ahead. The cutoff date for preliminary results was November 18, 2024.

Fed Lowers Interest Rates--How that can help consumers



After more than a year of keeping the federal funds rate steady, the Federal Reserve has begun lowering interest rates. After its September gathering, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) made a much-anticipated cut of 50 basis points, lowering the target range to between 4.75% and 5.0%. It dropped rates another 25 basis points in November, taking the fed fund rate down to between 4.50% to 4.75%.

The committee has one more meeting in 2024, on Dec.17 and 18. On Nov. 13, 2024, the CME Group put the likelihood that we'd see another 25-basis-point decline at about 82%, with 18% odds of there being no movement.

The FOMC doesn't choose the interest banks charge for credit cards, mortgages and other financial products. Instead, it dictates the rate at which they can charge each other for overnight loans of excess reserves, which is one of the most powerful tools the Fed has in guiding the U.S. economy.

With more interest rate cuts expected on the horizon, here are some financial moves to consider in the new economic landscape.

Credit cards

Changes to the fed funds rate won't mean large, immediate drops in the annual percentage rate (APR) credit card companies charge cardholders.

The Fed's last rate hike cycle, which stretched from March 2022 to July 2023, saw average APRs jump from 16.34% to over 20%. Consumers paying interest on their cards are now dealing with an average APR of 21.76%, according to the latest Federal Reserve data from August 2024.

If you're among this group, a 0% intro APR balance transfer card could give you time to pay off your balance without additional interest. Qualifying balance transfers on the Wells Fargo Reflect® Card made within 120 days of account opening qualify for a 0% intro APR for 21 months. (After that a variable 17.49%, 23.99%, or 29.24% APR applies.)

The Reflect card does have a balance transfer fee of 5% for each transfer, with a \$5 minimum. And you'll need to prioritize paying off the card so you're not stuck with an even higher interest rate once the zero-interest period ends.

Student loans

Interest on some private student loans should start declining, as well. So the time could be right for refinancing them.

"We had a whole generation of borrowers who enjoyed competitive rates," said Joe Bogardus, a financial services executive with Barnum Financial Group. "But if you took out private student loans in the last year or two, you might be stuck with a very high rate."

If you have a variable-rate loan, your rate may drop automatically. But refinancing and converting to a fixed-rate loan can ensure you lock in that lower number if rates go up again. And if you already have a fixed-rate private student loan, refinancing can allow you to grab a lower rate.

Private lenders look at credit scores and income to determine your rate when you refinance, so those with good credit will reap the most benefits from making this money move.

Citizens doesn't charge application, origination or disbursement fees and it offers a 0.50% rate discount on refinanced loans if you automate payments.



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If you have federal student loans, though, Bogardus advises serious caution: Refinancing through a private lender means you'll lose government protections like forbearance, deferment and income-driven repayment plans. And if widespread student loan forgiveness ever becomes a reality, you likely won't be able to participate.

Car loans

The average auto loan interest rate in the second quarter of 2024 was 6.84% for a new car, according to Experian's State of the Automotive Finance Market report, and 12.01% for a used car. That's up from 6.73% and 11.91% respectively in the first quarter, but down from the 15-year highs they hit in 2023.

As with most sectors, auto loan rates won't plummet now that the Fed has started cutting. But the timing might still be right to get that new ride.

"We're starting to see prices come down, now that the supply has increased and manufacturing has picked up," Bogardus said. "Look for deals — historically, September to November is when new models come out, so dealerships are looking to unload leftover inventory."

You might find better financing with dealerships, he added "because some manufacturers have an oversupply of certain models and have better discounts."

Mortgages

If you bought a house in the past few years and are saddled with a high mortgage rate, this rate-cutting cycle could be the right time to refinance, according to Bogardus.

"If you plan on staying in your home for a while, you might think about refinancing once mortgage rates drop another half-percent or percent," he said. Refinancing comes with costs, Bogardus advised, so make sure the savings you get from lowering your rate is more than what you'll pay in lender fees and closing costs.

If you want to convert your home equity into cash, Rocket Mortgage is our pick for cash-out refinancing.

While most lenders cap cash-out refinances at 80% to 90% of your home equity, Rocket approves qualified borrowers at 100% equity. And its average closing time for refinance mortgages is just 21 days, nearly half the national average.

Savings

While borrowers largely benefit from the Fed cutting rates, savers will take a hit. High-yield savings accounts have been a go-to savings vehicle in recent years, with some offering returns well over 5%.

Those yields will dwindle, Bogardus said, but not all at once.

"If your goals are shorter-term — or you're using the account for something like an emergency fund — you'll most likely want to still keep that HYSA," he said.

Rates for CDs will also drop in the next 10 to 12 months, he added, so now could be the right time to lock one in.

Investments

Bonds have an inverse relationship to interest rates, Bogardus said, so a rate-easing cycle is a good time to invest in them.

"It's possible to purchase bonds directly, but that requires understanding the individual credit risk involved," he added. "If you're not comfortable with that, it makes sense to be diversified in a bond fund."

Brokerage firms like Charles Schwab and Fidelity specialize in bond investing and have a variety of taxable and tax-free bond funds available.



How Early Holiday Shopping Can Help Your Mental Health



It's the most wonderful time of the year--again! Wonderful feasts, family and friends around the table, endless presents--and even more stress! This year, try something different: Get your holiday shopping done EARLY!

It seems that every year, shops start to sell Christmas items earlier and earlier. Clearly, there is a benefit for retailers to do so, but consumers tend to groan when they see Santas in the shops in September. The other day I heard a woman shriek softly as she stumbled upon the Christmas aisle in a supermarket and say, "For goodness' sake, Halloween has not even been yet." A sentiment that I am sure many can relate to.

But is the craziness of early Christmas shopping all bad? Or are there actual benefits to consumers to start their Christmas shopping early?

Don't leave it to the last minute

Worldwide, many people are struggling financially, meaning that Christmas may be viewed as an additional burden on the finances. Americans spend somewhere in the region of just under \$900 billion during the Christmas season, and the average person splashes out over \$800 on presents. With such staggering figures, it is not hard to understand that some may not be looking forward to Christmas. However, for people on a shoestring budget, early Christmas shopping may, in fact, be helpful, as it allows them to spread out the cost.

More than 60 percent of Americans buy their gifts a week before Christmas. This means that the expense is condensed to the same month and thus increases the temptation to put it on a credit card, adding additional interest or fees. By starting to shop earlier in the year, you can reduce the risk of giving in to temptation of using your credit card.

Leaving the Christmas shopping to the last minute can also increase your stress levels, which in turn may lead to feeling grouchy about shopping. This should be avoided, as negative emotions can increase the amount consumers spend.

Take your time

There is no need to rush (especially since it's awhile to Christmas) as most retailers will ensure they have enough stock on offer later in the season. This means that you can compare prices and make sure you pay the lowest possible.

Also, make sure you are not in a rush when you are shopping. Adding as little as just one second to the time you take when considering a purchase will help you make better decisions. By prolonging the decision-making process, you allow your brain to gather more information. This helps the brain to direct attention to what is important and ignore irrelevant information, such as online banners and in-store displays that can distract you.

Set a budget

Don't just go shopping without knowing what you can spend. Set a budget, perhaps for each month, or for your entire Christmas expenditures. Make sure you don't go over it, regardless of how tempting it may be.

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Try not to purchase things using a card. Instead, when possible, use cash, as you are more likely to spend more when using a card. People fail to see how much they are actually parting with their money when they use a card. As credit card debts soar, consumers need to be careful. In the U.S. alone, credit card debts have surpassed \$1 trillion, a record high, indicating that people are less careful with their spending.

If you like shopping in-store, you should know that you are more willing to buy products and pay more for them if you touch them. So, try to keep your hands to yourself and avoid picking up products whilst in store. This can be easier said than done, as many store displays are designed to encourage consumers to pick up the items.

Be creative

Thinking outside the traditional purchasing box can also be helpful. Try buying second-hand gifts, as many find them meaningful. You may even consider making something yourself, as handmade gifts have been found to symbolize love.

Perhaps even try to be creative with the Christmas dinner. Different supermarkets have different offers, and whilst you may always have bought the turkey in one shop, this year, maybe try another, especially if it is cheaper. Or even rethink the turkey altogether and find a festive, fun alternative that is cheaper.

The moral of this Christmas story? Don't let the crunch steal Christmas but be sensible and think ahead. Happy holidays!



“Winterizing” Your Home Can Save You Thousands



Planning ahead is a smart money move for homeowners. As temperatures drop, that may mean making changes in and around your home to help keep it safe and in full working order during the winter months.

Winterizing isn't just a buzzword, these chores will eliminate money stress from potential home emergencies. Let's look at which tasks you can tackle to save you money this winter.

Insulate your home

According to EnergyStar, 9 out of 10 homes are under-insulated. If you notice there are cold spots or anywhere you get a chill inside your home, this could be a sign that you're losing heat in your home.

Adding extra insulation can help ensure that you don't lose any of the valuable heat you're paying for. But heat loss isn't the only thing you need to worry about when it comes to insulation. If you have an unfinished basement or exposed outdoor plumbing, you may need to insulate those areas as well to prevent damage to pipes.

Schedule a roof inspection

Before winter comes is an ideal time to have your roof examined. Winter temperatures coupled with any added moisture caused by snow, rain, or condensation can make existing problems worse.

That, combined with the challenges winter weather presents when it comes to completing repairs makes fall an ideal time for having a pro take a look at your roof.

Schedule a roof inspection ahead of time and have any missing or broken shingles replaced.

Add weather stripping

A DIY friendly winterization chore, adding new or thicker weather stripping to seal any gaps can help keep drafty windows and doors from letting warm air out and cold air in.

Reducing air leaks can improve your energy consumption by 10-20% per year. And as an added bonus, this is a pretty inexpensive and easy task to tackle on your own.

Prune your trees

Winter is actually the perfect time to trim your trees. Trees go dormant during the winter, so pruning is less stressful on them during the colder months.

Also, without all the leaves, you can easily see which branches may pose a risk to your home or roof during a bad storm.

Have your HVAC unit inspected

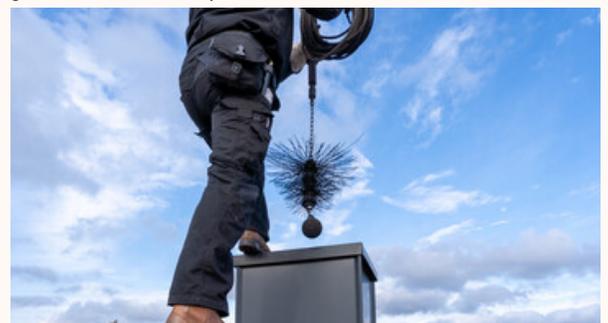
A seasonal inspection is vital to prolonging the life of your HVAC unit. If you have an outdoor unit, cleaning it can help clear away dust, debris, and leaves. Not only that, but it may help you to identify any potential problems before they occur – saving money on emergency repair calls.

Get your chimney cleaned

You may want to cozy up by the fire more often during the colder months, which means you should get your fireplace and chimney ready before you'll want to start using them for the season.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, your fireplace should be cleaned at least once per year. Fireplaces are a major cause of carbon monoxide poisoning and house fires.

Inspecting your chimney as part of your winterization process may help protect you and your family from catastrophe.



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CONTINUED**Upgrade to an energy efficient HVAC system**

If you live in an older home or your furnace struggles to keep up with your thermostat's demands, it might be time to consider upgrading your unit.

Energy technology continues to improve each year. Switching to a more energy-efficient model could save you 10-20% on your monthly energy bill.

Replace your filters

Heating units work most efficiently with a clean filter. Experts recommend replacing your furnace filter every one to three months, depending on the thickness.

This is another DIY option for most people, which makes it an inexpensive and easy winterizing task to cross off your do-do list.

Empty out sprinklers and hoses

Taking hoses off outdoor faucets and putting away gardening supplies that won't be used until the following summer can save money. They won't have to be replaced if they get lost or damaged over the winter.

Remember to remove any excess water in your sprinkler lines. Water expands as it freezes, and leftover water can cause broken pipes and leaks.

Check your ducts

If you have a duct system, you should have it checked for leaks. In the average home, 20% of the air that's moving through your ducts gets lost to leaks. Plugging up these holes can save you big when it comes to energy costs.

Clean your gutters

Clogged gutters can become a hazard to your home. Gutters are meant to direct the flow of excess water, without them, the water could cause flooding or damage to your home.

In the winter, the excess moisture trapped inside your gutters can freeze and make them heavy and prone to breaking.

Bottom line

Manage your money wisely by preventing home emergencies before they start. You may be able to do that by taking the time to winterize your home to keep it running smoothly all year round.

It's also important to maintain your home throughout the cold months and not just before the snow sets in, so you may need to run through this checklist more than once for the best results.

By winterizing your home, you can save hundreds--if not thousands--of dollars this winter.



Top Decorating Safety Tips for the Holiday Season



Decorating for the holidays is one of the true joys of the season. Decking the halls can help us connect to family tradition, create beauty for others to enjoy, and light up the chilly, dark, wintry nights.

As you string lights and hang ornaments this year, make sure to also keep safety top of mind. While the addition of candles, a Christmas tree, and decorations spread cheer, they can also bring some hazards.

Dedicated holiday decorating enthusiasts should always keep safety in mind first. Everyone is encouraged to do the same as they embrace the fun and joy of this tradition.

Here are some of the top decorating safety risks and tips for avoiding them.

Fire Hazards

Fire risks ramp up during the holiday season for multiple reasons. These can include increased use of candles, flammable seasonal decorations, frayed cords, and unsafe cooking practices.

According to the National Fire Protection Association, nearly one in five Christmas tree fires start due to lamps or bulbs, and 8% result from use of candles. Fires also increase during the season due to increased fireplace use and spending more time in the kitchen.

Follow these tips to keep your home safe from fires:

- Inspect holiday lights before you put them up. Replace light sets with broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires, or loose connections.
- Turn off holiday lights before going to bed or when you leave the house.
- Don't use indoor lights outdoors and vice versa.
- Never nail, tack, or stress wiring when hanging lights. Keep plugs off the ground, away from puddles and snow.
- Don't overload extension cords.
- Keep candles away from flammable materials. Place candles at least 12 inches away from anything that burns to ensure children or pets cannot reach them. Never leave candles unattended.
- If using a live tree, cut off about 2 inches of the trunk to expose fresh wood for better water absorption. Water it daily and remove it from your home when it's dry.
- Place your tree at least 3 feet away from fireplaces, radiators, and other heat sources. Ensure doorways are not blocked.
- When cooking or baking, don't leave the stove unattended. Periodically check the oven to ensure nothing has spilled.

And always be sure to having working smoke detectors.

Trips & Falls

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports 160 people are injured daily during the holiday season, with most incidents involving falls.

"Falls can increase this time of year for lots of reasons," Dr. Fisher says. "In addition to inclement weather, people may work with equipment they might not normally use, such as ladders."

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Follow these guidelines to prevent falls:

- When using a ladder, make sure it has stable placement, and wear shoes that allow for good traction.
- Losing your balance on a ladder can cause you to jump versus fall. This could lead to serious orthopedic injuries. If using a ladder at a high height, consider placing crash pads or mats alongside the ladder.
- Ladders should extend at least 3 feet above your roof or the surface to which you're attaching lights.
- Don't stand on your toes or the top rung of the ladder. The second rung from the top is as high as you should climb on a step ladder.
- For extension ladders, use the 4-to-1 rule: For every 4 feet of distance between the ground and point of contact (such as the roof), move the base of the ladder out 1 foot. Don't stand higher than the fourth rung from the top on an extension ladder.
- If you're at increased risk for falls, consider skipping climbing ladders. Instead, opt for other types of decorating.
- Don't stand on tables or chairs when decorating.
- Clear pathways of trip hazards, such as clutter, power cords, or extra furniture.
- Fix uneven walkways and steps inside and outside the home.

Considerations for Kids

It's wonderful to experience the holidays through the eyes of a child. As they take in the joy, ensure young ones stay safe. Risks include trips and falls around cords, choking hazards with small decorations, cuts from breakable objects, and burns.

"Children can get excited and forget certain safety rules," Dr. Fisher says. "Parents should stay extra vigilant and review safety rules."

Follow these guidelines to keep kiddos safe:

- Place matches, lighters, and candles out of the reach of children.
- Avoid putting sharp or breakable decorations in the reach of children. For example, place breakable or small ornaments higher up on the Christmas tree.



- Keep items with small, removable parts away from children.
- Remind kids to walk, not run in areas with cords.

Pets and Plants

Many holiday plants can cause discomfort if a cat or dog ingests them. This can lead to irritation, vomiting, diarrhea, and excessive drooling.

Poinsettias are considered the most dangerous holiday plants for cats and dogs to eat. Other plants to watch out for include Christmas cactus, Christmas rose, holly, lilies, and mistletoe.

If you notice your pet chewing or eating any of these plants, contact your family veterinarian or call the Pet Poison Hotline at (855) 764-7661. Note that there's a consultation fee for contacting the hotline.

Also keep an eye on your pet around the Christmas tree or other decorations. Some animals may try to eat ornaments or chew on light strings.

Convenient Care

Even with the best prevention, accidents and injuries can happen. Finding the right level of care for an injury is essential, Dr. Fisher says. For minor injuries and illnesses, visiting a primary care or urgent care location can save you time and money.

Injuries that warrant a trip to the emergency room include severe cuts with major bleeding, severe burns, serious head injuries, and severe broken bones.

"If you're unsure about where to go, please contact your provider's office," Dr. Fisher says. "The nurses on staff can help you identify the best next steps. Stay safe this holiday season so you can enjoy the festivities to the fullest."

Climate Change Increased Hurricane Strength

Human-caused climate change has intensified the strength of Atlantic hurricanes by about 18 miles per hour (29 kilometers per hour) over the past six years, according to a recent study. For most of the 40 storms analyzed, the extra energy from warmer oceans caused them to escalate by an entire hurricane category, as reported in the journal *Environmental Research: Climate*.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), a Category 5 storm causes more than 400 times the damage of a minimal Category 1 hurricane, over 140 times the damage of a minimal Category 3 hurricane, and more than five times the damage of a minimal Category 4 storm.

Significant increases in wind speed

For three storms, including this month's Hurricane Rafael, climate change boosted wind speeds so much that they increased by two storm categories. According to the study authors, this is not about more storms but increasing power from the worst storms.

"We know that the intensity of these storms is causing a lot more catastrophic damage in general," said lead author Daniel Gilford, a climate scientist at Climate Central, which conducts research on global warming. "Damages do scale (up) with the intensity."

Hurricane strength in a warmer climate

The effect was especially noticeable in more powerful storms, including those that reached the top of the Saffir-Simpson scale of storm intensity: Category Five, according to the study's authors.

While the study focused on storms from 2019 to 2023, the researchers included recent named storms from this year, all of which experienced an increase due to climate change.

"We had two Category Five storms here in 2024," Gilford said. "Our analysis shows that we would have had zero Category Five storms without human-caused climate change."



Notable hurricanes that gained strength

This year's three most devastating storms – Beryl, Helene, and Milton – increased by 18 mph (29 kph), 16 mph (26 kph), and 24 mph (39 kph) respectively because of climate change, the authors stated.

A separate study by World Weather Attribution (WWA) found that deadly Helene's wind speed increased by about 13 mph, which is close, noted Imperial College London climate scientist Friederike Otto, who coordinates the WWA team and praised the Climate Central work.

"It absolutely makes sense from a fundamental standpoint that what's going on is we've added more energy to the system," NOAA chief Rick Spinrad said at United Nations climate talks in Baku, Azerbaijan.

"The change is going to manifest in terms of what we're already seeing. You look at Hurricane Helene which was massive, 500 miles across. We're going to see changes in terms of the velocity of these storms. We're going to see changes in terms of Hurricane Milton spawning so many tornadoes."

Consistent patterns over recent years

Since 2019, eight storms – 2019's Humberto, 2020's Zeta, 2021's Sam and Larry, 2022's Earl, 2023's Franklin, and 2024's Isaac and Rafael – have increased by at least 25 mph (40 kph) in wind speed. Humberto and Zeta saw the most significant gains, each increasing by 31 miles per hour (50 kph).

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In 85% of the storms studied over the last six years, the authors observed a clear fingerprint of climate change in storm strength, Gilford said.

Warmer oceans and hurricane strength

Warm water is the main fuel for hurricanes. The warmer the Atlantic, Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico become, the more potential energy is available for storms. Other factors – such as high-level crosswinds and dry air – can weaken hurricanes.

The waters in hurricane-prone areas have increased by 2 to 3 degrees Fahrenheit (1.1 to 1.6 degrees Celsius) on average, and by as much as 4 degrees Fahrenheit (2.2 degrees Celsius) due to climate change, Gilford explained.

Linking warmer water to stronger storms

This information comes from Climate Central's use of scientifically accepted techniques to regularly track how much warmer oceans are due to the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas.

The experts use computer simulations to create a fictional world without human-caused warming and then compare it to current reality, attributing the differences to greenhouse gases.

They also account for other factors, such as the reduction of sulfate pollution from marine shipping, which had been slightly counteracting the warming before skies became clearer.

To understand how warmer waters lead to stronger storms, the authors examined a parameter called potential intensity, which is essentially the speed limit for any given storm based on the environmental conditions around it.

Expert insights and future implications

MIT hurricane expert and meteorology professor Kerry Emanuel, who pioneered potential intensity measurements, wasn't part of the study but said the findings are logical. It demonstrates the increase in storm strength that he predicted would occur 37 years ago, he noted.

Previous studies have shown that climate change has caused hurricanes to intensify more quickly and move more slowly, leading to increased rainfall.



Signs You May Have a Vitamin C Deficiency

Vitamin C is an essential nutrient that the body needs for growth and development. People who don't have enough vitamin C in their bodies have a vitamin C deficiency, also called scurvy. The human body does not make vitamin C naturally so we have to get all the vitamin C we need in the food we eat. Vitamin C is often consumed in fruits and vegetables, but it is in many foods.

While most people get enough vitamin C in their normal diet, some people become vitamin C deficient. It takes about two to three months of consuming too little vitamin C to become deficient. You are more at risk for developing scurvy if you smoke tobacco, consume an excess of alcohol, or have a variety of conditions, including an eating disorder, gastrointestinal disorders such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), food allergies, or type 1 diabetes.

Here are the symptoms of vitamin C deficiency and how to know when you should talk to your healthcare provider.

Behavioral Symptoms of Vitamin C Deficiency

Behavioral symptoms are often the first symptoms that present with a vitamin C deficiency. If you are vitamin C deficient, you may notice you are fatigued, irritable, and have a loss of appetite.

Irritability

Someone with a vitamin C deficiency may appear to be more irritable than normal. This irritability may be a result of an overall feeling of being unwell or it may occur as a result of other symptoms like anemia (a condition characterized by reduced red blood cell levels).

Loss of Appetite

A loss of appetite is one of the other symptoms vitamin C deficiency often presents with, along with other feelings of being generally unwell, such as nausea and flu-like symptoms.

Since vitamin C is necessary to help your body absorb iron, a vitamin C deficiency can cause an iron deficiency, contributing to the severity of these symptoms. A loss of appetite can also make eating more foods rich in vitamin C challenging.

NEWS & VIEWS



Skin Symptoms

People who are vitamin C deficient will generally experience a range of skin symptoms. This is because vitamin C plays a role in making a protein called collagen. Your body uses collagen to make skin, tendons, ligaments, and blood vessels.

One of the main skin symptoms of scurvy occurs when your blood vessels leak blood underneath your skin. This can look like purple patches on your skin, called purpura, as well as cause tiny spots of blood under the skin (petechiae) and bruising. Purpura can be as big as 10 millimeters in diameter. Your skin may also be dry and feel rough or scaly.

It may also be more difficult for someone with scurvy to heal from wounds or fight off an infection. Vitamin C plays a role in healing wounds and forming scar tissue. Without enough vitamin C, you may notice a scrape or blister takes longer to heal than it normally would.

Nail Symptoms

Not only are your skin and hair affected by a lack of vitamin C, but your nails are too. Your nails may appear to be bleeding, similar to your skin. They may also have a deformity where the center of the nail is indented and the end of the nail is elevated. This may resemble a spoon-like shape.

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CONTINUED**Hair Symptoms**

If you have scurvy, your hair may appear to be more twisted or bent. This is because the deficiency caused a lack of a certain type of bond in your hair.

The hair on your legs may also be affected. Since the blood vessels are affected by a lack of vitamin C, this can cause bleeding around the hair follicles in your legs. This can lead to swelling in your legs.

Vision Symptoms

Your eyes can be affected by a lack of vitamin C. Vision symptoms can be severe and significantly affect your quality of life, so it's important to get treatment right away. Vitamin C deficiency can cause:

- Small blood vessel bleeds in the white part of your eye
- Damaged nerves
- Bleeding into the optic nerve (the nerve that connects your eyes to your brain)
- Blurred vision
- Dry eyes
- Yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice)

These symptoms can lead to problems like tissue damage, swelling, and changes in the optic nerve. If you experience any of these symptoms talk to your healthcare provider right away. They will likely refer you to an optometrist or an ophthalmologist (two types of eye doctors).

Joint and Bone Symptoms

Vitamin C deficiency can cause capillary (blood vessel) fragility, which contributes to the skin and hair symptoms mentioned above. Capillary fragility can occur in the joints, causing pain and swelling, usually in the legs. Prolonged periods of standing can worsen leg swelling due to the pull of gravity.

Additionally, one of the roles of vitamin C is to repair and maintain bones and cartilage. Having scurvy means that your bones and cartilage are not getting enough vitamin C to grow and develop. This can cause your bones to become brittle and weak and joints that are swollen and painful.

Since vitamin C deficiency can affect bone formation, people with advance survey may notice something called a "scorbutic rosary." This term means that there is a visible bumpy pattern on the skin where the ribs meet the breastbone. There may also be an indentation in the breastbone.

Physical Symptoms

You may notice physical symptoms as a result of vitamin C deficiency. This can include fatigue, anemia, joint pain and swelling, and symptoms associated with your mouth.

Fatigue

Fatigue is an early sign of vitamin C deficiency; although, it is also an early sign of a variety of conditions and deficiencies. Fatigue due to vitamin C deficiency will likely also be accompanied by weakness and muscle aching.

Anemia

Vitamin C helps with the absorption of iron, one of the minerals that make up red blood cells. When there isn't enough vitamin C in the body, this can affect the absorption of iron and lead to anemia.

Anemia is when the body doesn't have enough healthy red blood cells that can provide oxygen to the body. This lack of oxygen can lead to symptoms such as:

- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Shortness of breath (dyspnea)
- Dizziness
- Headaches

Other than vitamin C deficiency, anemia can have a few different causes. The treatment can vary based on the cause and how severe it is.

Mouth Problems

Repairing and maintaining your teeth is one of the many roles of vitamin C. A lack of vitamin C may cause your enamel (the protective outer layer of your teeth) to weaken.

Vitamin C deficiency can also cause inflammation of the gums, called gingivitis. Gingivitis may cause your gums to bleed, swell, or appear red or purple. Bleeding gums are one of the most common symptoms of a vitamin C deficiency.

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If you are experiencing any symptoms of vitamin C deficiency, you may need treatment from your healthcare provider. They can help figure out how much vitamin C you need and if you need other treatments for the symptoms you are experiencing.

Late-stage vitamin C deficiency can be life-threatening. If you are experiencing symptoms of scurvy, contact your healthcare provider. Look out for severe symptoms which can include:

- Severe swelling
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Seizures

Treatment includes vitamin C supplementation and adjustments to your diet. You should start to see some improvement in your symptoms within 24 hours of starting treatment.

A Quick Review

Even though most people get enough vitamin C in their regular diet, there are some people who become vitamin C deficient. Vitamin C deficiency, also called scurvy, can lead to symptoms that affect your skin, muscles, joints, behavior, and overall well-being.

If you are experiencing symptoms of a vitamin C deficiency, talk to your healthcare provider. They can test your levels of vitamin C and can advise you on treatment that may include supplements and adjustments to your diet.



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.

EastRise Credit Union

141 Harvest Lane,
Williston, VT 05495

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Small-town credit union with big-bank capabilities. Building stronger financial futures.

As a people-first, community-driven institution, we're about much more than numbers. We're about understanding your goals, developing strong relationships, and building a better future for you and our communities.

Why Bank with EastRise?

We planted roots here in Vermont 75 years ago. We are sustainable. Saving the environment and your money are not mutually exclusive. We look for solutions to support your wealth and protect our planet to build a more sustainable future. We are personal. People first, numbers second. We want to get to know your goals and challenges better than anyone else so we can find the right financial solution for you.

We are committed. Corners are not meant to be cut. The only way we know how to do banking is with care, attention to detail, and commitment to finding a better way of doing things tomorrow.

Who we are

At EastRise, we believe that banking should be a source of personal strength and peace of mind. Here, it's about people, relationships, and using finance to empower our members. Because everyone deserves a stronger and more sustainable financial future.

That's why we go above and beyond to provide the financial tools and guidance that protect the well-being of our people and communities, extending our Vermont roots to provide a sense of belonging to members everywhere.

From trusted digital banking and a relationship-first approach to affordable home ownership and green lending, we rise to the challenges of each new day and raise the bar for everyone.

Because EastRise is committed to doing better and creating better experiences for our members, both in banking and in life.

That commitment is what makes all the difference.



Where you bank makes a difference

It takes a collective effort to make a positive impact. Opening an account at EastRise supports our initiatives to bring people together and build a better world that lifts us all up.

Employees Credit Union (GECU), as membership had expanded beyond members of Local No. 28.

CORNERS WEREN'T MADE TO BE CUT

Doing better requires more than a quick fix. We strive to make real, lasting impact in all that we do, no matter what path you're on.

Ever since our founding members came together over 75 years ago to provide local alternatives to traditional banks, we've been connecting people and communities with financial resources that make real, lasting impact.

That's why, when New England Federal Credit Union and Vermont State Employees Credit Union came together in 2023, the goal was always to find the right name for our unified brand, one that reflects the strengths of both legacies.

New name. Same team. Same focus on supporting our members and communities.

This mindset—people over profit—is at the core of who we are. By delivering exceptional customer service and a full array of banking products, we elevate everyone, helping our people and communities rise to their fullest potential.

For more information, visit our website at www.eastrise.com or call us toll-free at (802) 879-8790.

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EP Federal Credit Union
300 14th St SW Rm 215A,
Washington, DC 20228

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Welcome to a better environment for your money.

Our History

EP Federal Credit Union was originally chartered in 1935 by 10 employees of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing for the purpose of 'promoting thrift and providing a source of credit' for the employees there. During the late 1970's and 1980's, the credit union made several charter changes through mergers and expansions to include other organizations and grow our potential field of membership.

Two major groups were the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the students and faculty of Catholic University of America and American University. We continued to serve these groups through traditional means through the first decade of the twenty-first century. In 2011, NCUA, our regulatory agency, approved a very simple change to our name – from Engraving & Printing to EP Federal Credit Union. This change might have gone unnoticed had it not been for the accompanying huge changes in our method of service delivery.

Over time, our opportunities for growth had shifted to our EPA and student fields of membership, and our board of directors made a strategic decision to employ the dynamics of technology available to the financial services industry to enhance access for our members. Along with our name change, we introduced a new logo and a new tagline demonstrating our new commitment.

Our focus was redirected to virtual service delivery and to helping our members show their concern for the environment. Through the years we have remained a strong financial institution that demonstrates our commitment to the needs of our members by providing high-quality financial products utilizing technology for high-performance in an environmentally responsible way.

As a not-for-profit financial cooperative, we are able to offer low-rate loans, competitive savings and conveniences with lower or no fees. You contribute directly to the well-being of the credit union simply by taking advantage of these benefits.

For more information, visit our website at www.epfcu.org or call us toll-free at (202) 874-3210.

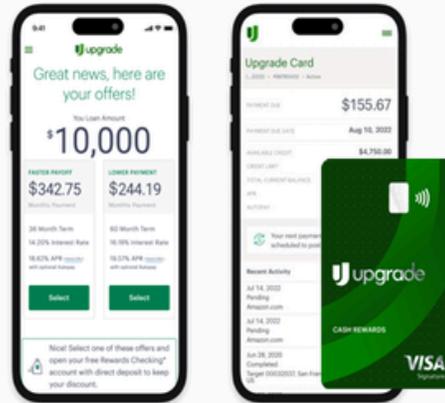


2024 Q4

Upgrade Credit Union Partnerships



With one of the most experienced FinTech management teams, Upgrade sells to over 200 financial institution loan buying partners (including ~180 credit unions) and facilitates affordable, responsible cards and loans to mainstream consumers. Upgrade checks for qualification, including geography/credit box and "memberizes" borrowers in funnel, delivering new loans and members to the credit union.



Personal Loan

- Facilitated \$33B+ consumer loans since inception
- Fully amortizing, fixed-rate loans up to 7 years, \$50,000
- 97%+ of borrowers on auto ACH debit
- 88%+ of loans for debt consolidation; 50%+ of borrowers elect direct payoff of existing credit card obligation

Home Improvement

- Platform for home improvement merchants that facilitates point-of-sale financing offered to their customers
- Merchants are underwritten and continuously monitored

Indirect Auto

- Personal use only with a focus on "transportation" vehicles
- Hybrid program provides fully automated decisions and ability for dealer to interact with underwriter on more complex transactions

Return Profile	Personal Loan 660+ Forward Flow	Personal Loan 660+ Clip Purchase	Indirect Auto 640+	Home Improvement 660+
Price	100	101	Low-100's	Mid-90's
Interest Rate	13.59%	13.59%	9.59%	8.37%
WAL (yrs.)	1.74	1.74	2.27	2.91
Annualized CO (ACL)	5.32%	5.32%	0.66%	1.79%
Servicing Fee	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%	1.00%
Other (Collections, LTF, etc)	0.16%	0.16%	0.11%	0.25%
Projected Return	7.16%	6.52%	6.54%	7.34%

Experienced Management Team



Renaud Laplanche,
Chief Executive Officer
Founder and former CEO of Lending Club issuing over \$8B in loans annually



Matt Wierman,
Head of Personal Loans
Former Head of Personal Loans at Lending Club with 15+ years of experience at American Express, Provident and Wells Fargo



Adelina Grozdanova,
Head of Investor Group
Former head of the Institutional Investor Group at Lending Club and former banker at Morgan Stanley



Myles Reaz,
Chief Credit Officer
20+ years of risk management, product and strategy at HSBC, Citi, Wells Fargo and Bank of the West (\$15.4Bn consumer book)



Thomas Curran,
Chief Compliance Officer
Former member of Promontory Financial Group's Consumer Protection Practice & 10+ years at the US Treasury



Jeff Bogan,
Chief Financial Officer
Former head of the Investor Group at Lending Club delivering funding for over \$2B per quarter in loan volume

*Rates as of October 2024.

*Upgrade routinely monitors industry benchmark rates and updates pricing quarterly.

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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 Spring cycle are being accepted through May 1, 2025.

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 www.AmericanConsumerCouncil.org/education.

For more information, call 1-800-544-0414 or visit ACC's website.

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 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 pleased 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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