

5 basic questions you should ask yourself

MONEYFIX

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When it comes to personal finance, what you don't know can hurt you. Here are five questions you should know the answer to.

■ **When should you take Social Security?** “Often people take benefits when they retire, or as soon as they're eligible,” says Craig Ferrantino, president of Craig James Financial Services in Melville. Taking benefits before full retirement age means a permanent decrease in payments. If you wait, payments are higher. Couples can increase their benefits by coordinating when and how they file. Consult an adviser.

■ **Is your portfolio diversified?** “Your portfolio should include not only large cap U.S. stocks, but smaller and foreign companies, bonds and other invest-

ments,” says Ben Sullivan, a certified financial planner with Palisades Hudson Financial Group in Scarsdale. Don't load up on your company's stock, adds Mark Meinberg, a partner with EisnerAmper in Syosset.

■ **Is it OK to borrow from your retirement plan?** “Look at every other possibility,” says Kent Allison, a partner with PwC's Personal Financial Services in Florham Park, New Jersey. Not only do you jeopardize retirement, but if you lose your job, you'll have to pay the entire amount back, or be hit with taxes and possibly penalties.

■ **What percent of my income should I save annually?** “At least 10 to 15 percent,” says Keith Lanton, president of Lantern Investments. Set up automatic payroll deductions into savings.

■ **How much are your credit card fees?** Think twice about balance transfers. You could be charged up to 5 percent of the transferred balance, with no cap, says Eric Szczurowski of Kuttin-Metis Wealth Management in Melville.