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February 2021

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- 2 Is Dark Chocolate Really Good for Your Heart?
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- 4 Protect Yourself From COVID-19 Scams!

MONEY SCAMS ARE SKYROCKETING

Here Are 3 Ways to Protect Yourself Right Now

For the past year, scammers have been working full time to fleece people. As a result of COVID-19, federal financial relief efforts, and state-level relief efforts, scammers have found a new way to get into their victims' pockets.

Now, they're using COVID-19 again, this time with the "vaccine scam." Through this scam, they'll sign you up for the COVID-19 vaccine in exchange for a fee. They are also using variations of the grandparent scam, in which scammers pretend to be a family member in trouble (this time, they have COVID-19 or have lost their job) and they need money. Scammers make phone calls, send text messages, and craft phishing emails, hoping you'll take the bait.

How can you protect yourself from these financial scams and more? Try these three different ways!

1. **Shut them down.** If you get a call from a scammer, hang up immediately (better yet, don't answer unknown callers at all). At the same time, delete scam texts or emails the second you see them. If you get a call, text, or email

from someone claiming to be with the government or a government agency, it's a scammer. No one from any federal agency will **ever** call you out of the blue. Anyone claiming to have a cure or pretending to be in desperate need of money is also trying to scam you. Never say a word back to them. Cut them off and go about your day.

2. **Sign up for Informed Delivery by USPS.** This free service is a great way to monitor your incoming mail. Every morning, USPS sends you an email with scanned images of the day's mail (this doesn't usually include larger parcels). When you pick up your mail later in the day, you can verify if anything is missing. Scammers may prefer phone calls, but mail thieves are still very much on the prowl.

3. **Sign up for an identity protection and fraud detection service.** You never know who might end up with your personal information, but you can take steps to keep it safe. There are several services, like LifeLock, Identity Guard, and Intelius Identity Project, that offer comprehensive identify protection. They monitor credit cards, addresses, phone numbers, bank accounts, and more with the purpose of scoping out unusual or fraudulent behavior. Many services can be customized to fit your specific needs.



Random Acts of Kindness

The Importance of Making Someone's Day Brighter

If there's one thing we can all agree on it's that we need a little extra kindness in the world. This month, on Feb. 17, there's a day called Random Acts of Kindness Day, which serves as a reminder that random acts of kindness are important — not just on that day but every day.

As a coffee drinker, I sometimes stop by Tim Hortons for a cup and pay for the person behind me. Or when I'm out and about, I may drop some extra change into an expired parking meter. (It's always a pain to come back to a ticket, especially when you're only over by a few minutes.)

The truth is that small acts of kindness can have a big impact on others. They can turn their day around or make their entire week. And they're more inclined to pay it forward, adding to the kindness on any given day. All it takes is a little bit here or there — not so much that it becomes a financial burden.

Of course, most random acts of kindness have nothing to do with money. Sometimes, they are as simple as a smile, wave, or a compliment — small things you can sprinkle throughout your day that bring a little good into the lives of others.

We used to spend a fair amount of time in nursing homes socializing with seniors and bringing a little kindness into their world. Unfortunately, we haven't been able to do that in recent months. But folks in nursing homes are often overlooked, and we made a point to do it when we could. Most seniors have a story to tell. They just need someone to listen, and being that person is another way to make a big difference.

Here's another thing about random acts of kindness that people often forget: They aren't just for others, but also for yourself! Do something out of the ordinary to make your own day a little brighter. It could be as simple as stopping by your

favorite restaurant for your comfort meal. Or maybe it's something more extravagant, like a massage or pedicure. The point is that it's important to be kind to yourself, too.

Random Acts of Kindness Day is very much in the spirit of Valentine's Day, another day that reminds us to share our love with others, usually our spouse or significant other.

However, it's always good to tell any of your loved ones how much you care about them.



Valentine's Day was never really a big deal in our household, at least in the traditional sense. I'm thankful my wife is low-maintenance — and I mean that in a good way! She's not a flowers, chocolates, and diamonds type of person. Usually, we'll just go out for a nice dinner and a movie. This year, that might not materialize, but it just means we'll stay home, relax, and just spend the evening together. But if we do go out, we'll go to a local restaurant.

Over the past year, we've gotten into the habit of spending our money locally and choosing locally owned restaurants over chains (though I still get coffee from Tim Hortons from time to time). We've also been ordering out a few times a week. Many local restaurants are struggling and we want to do what we can to help. It may not be much in the grand scheme of things, but we're sure going to try to make a difference.

Glenn Matecun

Questions to Ask the Next Generation

Over the next three decades, an estimated \$30 trillion will be passed from baby boomers to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. As this transfer of assets, money, and property begins to take place, many families have questions. Those at the head of the family — that is, those currently with the most wealth — may have the most questions.

They have important decisions to make as they structure their estate plan and refine all the details within it. To make the most out of their plan, baby boomers need to know how their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will handle what they inherit.

Older generations have cause for concern. According to the Williams Group, a wealth consulting firm based in Georgia, upwards of 70% of family money is expected to disappear by the end of the second generation. By the third generation, 90% of that money is expected to be

gone. Why is that? Most of it comes down to irresponsibility and a lack of planning on the part of the heirs. Basically, the heirs did not take care of their inheritance.

This highlights the need to have the money talk with your family. Here are some important questions to ask yourself: Do your family members have the same values as you when it comes to money? Are they educated on financial matters? Do they have the knowledge they need to handle a transfer of assets, money, or property? How well do they handle their own finances?

There are many questions to ask as you prepare your estate plan. Don't hesitate to have conversations with your family. Ask questions and help educate them on matters they don't understand well. The more prepared you and your family are for the transfer of assets, money, and property, the more likely each will be properly cared for over the next generation and for generations to come.



The Truth About Dark Chocolate

As you give and get chocolate for Valentine's Day (or jump on post-holiday chocolate sales), you'll probably hear that dark chocolate is healthy for you. Before you decide to incorporate dark chocolate into your daily diet, you should ask yourself what that means. Can dark chocolate really be "healthy"?

Studies on dark chocolate's supposed benefits focus on compounds found within cocoa, specifically flavanols, which are found in most fruits and vegetables (and cocoa!) and help lower blood pressure and reduce low-density lipoproteins, aka "bad" cholesterol.

By that notion, dark chocolate *does* have heart health benefits, but taking advantage of those benefits is not as simple as just eating dark chocolate. Each bar will include a percentage, which indicates the amount of cocoa. The higher the percentage, the better; 70%–80% is considered the sweet spot in terms of balancing health benefits and flavor, but as the percentage of cocoa increases, the more bitter the chocolate becomes.

However, the amount of flavanols found in a typical 1-ounce piece of 80% dark chocolate is very small. Alice H. Lichtenstein, a Gershoff professor of nutrition science and policy at Tufts University in Boston, says, "Dark chocolate has more flavanols than other types of chocolate; the data to suggest there is enough to have a health effect is thin at this point."

A 2017 study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association that focused on dark chocolate, cocoa, and raw almonds also concluded that the heart benefits were small. Dark chocolate appeared most effective when paired with other heart-healthy foods, such as almonds.

So what about other types of chocolate, like milk or semi-sweet? Once the cocoa content falls below 60%, the benefits disappear entirely. The flavanol levels are too low and the sugar and fat content too high, which negates any heart health benefits.

As with all good things, moderation is key. Eating too much dark chocolate has the reverse effect and can cause inflammation, and inflammation is the enemy of the heart.



YOU CAN NEVER GO WRONG WITH A NEW HOBBY! What Do You Want to Do This Year?

While we're a month into the new year and then some, many people are still thinking about what they want out of the coming year. They aren't sure if they should set goals or make plans just yet — mostly because we still aren't completely sure how the year will unfold as vaccines roll out across the country.

Regardless of what happens on that front, it's worth considering taking up a new hobby. We talked about hobbies briefly in last month's cover story. They are a great way to stay active and healthy — especially in our later years. They also offer the opportunity to have fun and spend quality time by yourself (or with your thoughts), with your spouse, or with your kids or grandkids.

With the right skill set, dedication, and desire, hobbies can also become a source of supplemental income, which can be very beneficial for those approaching or in retirement. There are many hobbies that translate well into part-time and full-time work, depending on how much time and effort you want to invest and what you expect to get in return. One common example is woodworking. Woodworkers, even hobbyists, can create one-of-a-kind and custom pieces. They may also perform certain home services, including cabinetry, depending on the tools they have available.

Even if you're not looking to turn a profit, you may find your hobby can at least be self-sustaining (that is, pay for the materials required).

There are so many great hobbies out there! If you love the thrill of a good find, consider antiques. If you like to work with your hands, try different kinds of arts and crafts or restore an old car. If you'd like to get outside more, take up landscape photography. You could also learn a foreign language, join a master gardener course, or learn new recipes in the kitchen.

If you have ever thought about turning your hobby into a mini-career, or you're thinking about taking up a new hobby, go for it! No matter what you do, pursuing a new hobby is a great way to spend 2021.

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Solution on Pg. 4

Helpful Resources

- **Is your estate plan up to date?** Ask us about our **FREE** estate planning checkup. Call our office or email Julie@MTOLaw.com.

- **Don't miss our upcoming estate planning and elder law workshops** — our website has our entire educational calendar for the year.

- **Learn about estate planning and elder law topics in plain English.** Check out our Elder Care Whiteboard Videos at MichiganEstatePlans.com.

- **Let us be your trusted advisor for all your legal matters.** Our clients' referrals have helped us grow. We want to return the favor by helping you find a great attorney outside the fields of estate planning, elder law, and probate. Instead of taking your chances on Google or the phone book, let us put you in touch with an experienced attorney who can help you. Our clients often call us in need of an attorney who focuses on family law, personal injury, auto accidents, elder and nursing home abuse, workers' comp, Social Security disability, and many other areas. To get the best results, you need an experienced attorney to help. If you want a referral, call our office or email Julie@MTOLaw.com. We are glad to help!

