

by **Kerry K. Taylor** on May 31, 2010

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Pinching your personal identification number (PIN) is big business for debit card fraudsters. In 2009, \$142.3 million was lost to debit card fraud, an increase of 36% from \$104.5 million in 2008. If these statistics from the Interac Association are any indication, Canadian debit cardholders would be wise to protect their PINs at points of sale and ATMs. Here's how to do it:

1. Shield your PIN.

Criminals need two pieces of information to commit debit card fraud – your PIN and the magnetic stripe information on your debit card. If you fall prey to a magnetic stripe "skimming" device piggy-backed onto an ATM, your best anti-fraud protection is to shield your PIN.

Always use your hand or body to cover the keypad to prevent "shoulder surfers" and even sophisticated hidden cameras from seeing you enter your four-digit PIN.

Financial Post personal finance columnist Jonathan Chevreau wasn't immune to debit card fraud. Both his chequing account and line of credit were hit by card-skimming criminals who spied his PIN.

"The lesson is, even if you think you're alone when entering your PIN, assume a hidden camera is observing you," wrote Chevreau in a *Financial Post* [article](#). "So cover the entry pad with your free hand to obscure it from view."

2. Memorize your PIN.

Never write your PIN on the back of your debit card, chip-enabled credit card, or on a note in your wallet. Thieves love an easy target, and freely giving them your PIN makes a lost or stolen wallet a gold mine for fraud. Memorizing your PIN can help keep those digits safe.

Check out these [10 Stolen Wallet Tips](#) to help protect yourself if the unthinkable happens.

3. Don't share your PIN.

Your PIN should be your little secret and not shared with anyone, including: family, friends, and even financial planners. If you suspect that someone knows your PIN, change it immediately or contact your financial institution for help.

4. Avoid an easy PIN.

When selecting or changing your PIN, the Interac Association advises to never use obvious information, such as your telephone number, date of birth, address or Social Insurance Number. "These numbers are often stored in the same place as your banking card, enabling criminals to easily guess your PIN."

5. Create a complex PIN.

Make your four-digit PIN a tough password to crack by using random numbers, avoiding patterns, and steering clear from a numerical sequence. A simple PIN sequence could be "0123" or "6789", while a more complex PIN would be "4920". Repeating a single number like "5555" might be an easy PIN for you to remember, but it is also an easy code for a criminal to crack.

The Canadian Bankers Association protects debit card users with the *Canadian Code of Practice for Consumer Debit Card Services*. If you are a proven victim of debit card fraud, you should get your money back from your financial institution.

Your Turn: Do you shield your PIN? Have you ever dealt with debit card fraud?
