

Information You Should Know

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Investment Updates

The End of the Recession

In September 2010, the National Bureau of Economic Research announced the long-awaited news: an end date for the recession that had begun in December 2007. The NBER determined the official end date as June 2009, quieting down (if not completely silencing) double-dip fears. NBER defines a recession as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real GDP, real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales. Looking back at the performance of the main asset classes during the recession and in the months following the official end date, gold was the best overall performer, and long-term government bonds offered consistent positive returns. Out of the investments with the worst performances during the recession, REITs posted the most-impressive return in the 16 post-recession months.

Returns During and After the Most Recent Recession

	Recession Dec 2007 to Jun 2009*	Aftermath Jul 2009 to Oct 2010*
Gold	19.3%	44.1%
Long-term government bonds	8.4%	14.5%
Treasury bills	1.9%	0.1%
Small stocks	-33.8%	42.5%
Large stocks	-35.5%	32.2%
International stocks	-39.7%	28.4%
REITs	-48.1%	81.8%

*Returns in table represent cumulative returns during time periods indicated, not geometric returns.

Past performance is no guarantee of future results. This is for illustrative purposes only and not indicative of any investment. An investment cannot be made directly in an index. Holding a portfolio of securities for the long term does not ensure a profitable outcome, and investing in securities always involves risk of loss. International investments involve special risks such as fluctuations in currency, foreign taxation, economic and political risks, liquidity risks, and differences in accounting and financial standards. REITs are subject to certain risks, such as risks associated with general and local economic conditions, interest rate fluctuation, credit risks, liquidity risks and corporate structure. Small stocks are more volatile than large stocks, are subject to significant price fluctuations, business risks, and are thinly traded. Government bonds and Treasury bills are guaranteed by the full faith and credit of the United States government as to the timely payment of principal and interest, while stocks, REITs, and gold are not guaranteed.

Source: Gold—Wall Street Journal London P.M. closing price. Long-term government bonds—20-year U.S. government bond. Treasury bills—30-day U.S. Treasury bill. Small stocks—Dimensional Fund Advisors, Inc. (DFA) U.S. Micro Cap Portfolio. Large stocks—Standard & Poor's 500® Index, an unmanaged group of securities considered to be representative of the U.S. stock market. International stocks—Morgan Stanley Capital International Europe, Australasia, and Far East (EAFE®) Index. REITs—FTSE NAREIT Equity REIT Index®.

Advisor Corner

Independence, Objectivity and Transparency



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Achieving the Proper Balance of Risk and Return

An important decision that every investor must make is determining the amount of investment risk to assume while maintaining a level of comfort. Risk is simply defined as the probability that the actual return for an investment will differ from that which was expected. It is possible that some or even all of an investor's original investment may be lost. In other words, there are no sure things in the investment world.

All investments contain some degree of risk; however, some investments are considered more volatile (riskier) than others. Low levels of uncertainty, or low risk, are usually linked to investments with low potential returns. On the other hand, investments with high levels of uncertainty, or high risk, are generally accompanied by high potential returns. The relationship between risk and return is such that one must be willing to accept greater risk if one wants to pursue greater returns.

A common misunderstanding among investors is that higher risk will lead to greater returns. According to the risk/return tradeoff, however, higher risk investments provide an investor with the possibility, not the certainty, of higher returns.

Consider the table below showing the periodic returns of three hypothetical investments. Investment A fluctuates very little from period to period. It has low volatility or a low amount of risk. However, this low risk is accompanied by low average returns. Conversely, Investment B has greater periodic fluctuations from one period to the other and has even lost money in one of the periods. On the flip side, Investment B's average return is higher than that of Investment A, corresponding to this higher level of risk. The riskiest investment of the three is Investment C, which has experienced a double-digit loss in one period. The returns for Investment C have also been periodically quite high, resulting in the highest average return of all three investments.

As the saying goes, "There is no free lunch"; in many cases, investments that generate high returns also come with high levels of volatility or risk. These high returns act as a compensation for investors, for assuming high risk. Further, it is very important to realize that taking on a high level of risk in hopes of attaining a high level of return is not for everyone.

An investor's risk tolerance varies according to age, income requirements, financial goals, and other considerations particular to each investor's unique situation. It is essential to determine your attitude toward—and your tolerance for—risk, while (all the time) keeping in mind that past performance is by no means a guarantee of future results.

Periodic Performance of Three Investments

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Average
Investment A	4%	7%	5%	7%	5%	2%	5%	5.0%
Investment B	2%	12%	-4%	21%	12%	1%	8%	7.4%
Investment C	5%	22%	-14%	32%	16%	-4%	13%	10.0%

Common Investing Mistakes

Almost all of us have made investing mistakes. The key is not to make the same mistake twice. These mistakes can directly affect whether or not you achieve your desired goals. By repeating even just one mistake, individual investors can quickly become their own worst enemy. Below are some common mistakes that many fall prey to and some suggestions on how to sidestep them.

Starting Too Late

The first mistake a large number of investors make is waiting too long to initiate a long-term investment plan. The earlier you can start the investment process, the more likely it is that the plan will succeed. For example, let's consider two investors—Bill and Tim. Bill began investing \$5,000 per year 30 years ago. Tim began investing \$10,000 per year 20 years ago. Assuming a hypothetical return of 10% per year, Bill's ending wealth value was \$822,470 compared to \$572,750 for Tim. Thanks to the power of compounding, a small amount of money, wisely invested early on, can turn into a large sum over time. Avoid procrastinating; start investing today.

Lack of Diversification

By investing all of your money into just one asset class, industry, or company, you are placing all of your eggs into one basket—and this can be extremely risky. It is better to combine a variety of investments, such as stocks, bonds, and cash, which are unlikely to move in the same direction. Your risk exposure should be lessened as a result.

Chasing Past Performance

Yesterday's hot stocks or mutual funds may not be today's best investments. A good number of investors purchase assets when they have already reached their peak, only to watch their performance subsequently suffer. It may be a good idea to choose investments with a history of good performance as well as quality management.

Lack of Research

No matter what type of investment you plan to make, be sure to conduct the proper research. It is unwise to allocate your money to an investment you do not understand. There are a number of helpful resources that you can explore—ranging from public information to professional advice. Take advantage of these when possible.

Unrealistic Expectations

Many investments require time to grow. Investors often become frustrated with the early performance of their investments, decide to sell too quickly, and move the proceeds into other investments. This will result in too much trading, which is not only expensive, but also usually unnecessary. It is important to maintain a long-term view and to not be distracted by short-term results.

Overconfidence

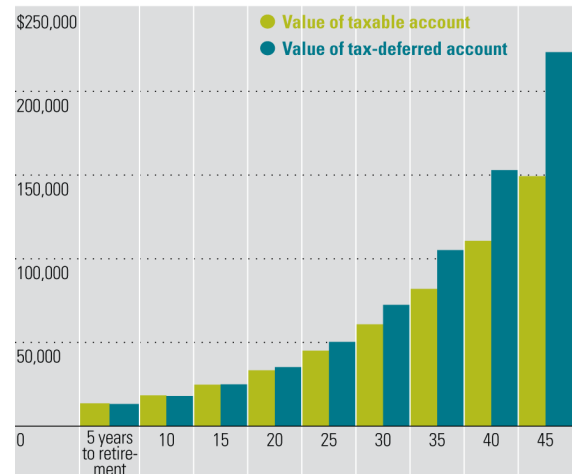
Confidence is a good thing, but overconfidence can cause investors to improperly select investments. Too much assurance in one's knowledge and ability can lead investors to focus on the upside and deemphasize the potential downside of investments. Instead, a solid financial plan constructed by a professional can go a long way.

Take Advantage of Tax-Deferred Accounts

One of the main reasons why retirement accounts are so beneficial is the power of tax deferral. In a tax-deferred investment vehicle such as a 401(k) plan or an IRA, your earnings are not taxed until you begin withdrawing money from your account in retirement. Consider the image. A hypothetical value of \$10,000 is invested in both a taxable and a tax-deferred account. The difference in value between the two accounts becomes quite substantial after 20+ years. For investors with a long investment time horizon, a tax-deferred portfolio is an excellent choice.

Please keep in mind that once you begin to withdraw money from your retirement account, you will be taxed accordingly. However, since you will most likely earn less in retirement, withdrawals from a deferred portfolio may be taxed at a lower rate.

Benefits of Deferring Taxes



Withdrawals of tax-deferred accumulations are subject to ordinary income taxes. A 10% federal tax penalty may apply to withdrawals made before age 59½. Returns and principal invested in stocks are not guaranteed.

Source: This hypothetical example is for an investor in the 28% bracket using the 2009 tax code (estimated to become the 31% tax bracket in 2011). \$10,000 is invested in stocks at the beginning of year 1 (2010). Assumes an 8% annual total return (6% price return and 2% income return) and a 15% tax rate on capital gains and dividends in year 1 (2010), after which the rates revert to 20% and the investor's marginal tax rate, respectively. The investment is taxed at a 28% marginal tax rate in year 1 (2010), and then reverts to 31%. Taxes are assessed yearly on the taxable account but only at the end of the period on the tax-deferred account. Estimates are not guaranteed.

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