



YOUR FIRST STEPS TO INVESTING

The Beginner's Guide to Building Wealth

The investing basics and money habits to help you start building wealth - even if you're starting from zero.

STARTING LATER, BUILDING ANYWAY

I didn't start investing until **31.**

A couple of years ago, I knew almost nothing about investing. I didn't really understand how the stock market worked or where to begin.

Once I started learning the basics, I realized it didn't have to feel nearly as complicated as I'd imagined.

Since then, my husband and I have built a six-figure investment portfolio through consistent contributions, intentional habits, and investment growth.

I don't necessarily want to stop working. I want more options. The flexibility to spend more time with my family, build something of my own, and have more control over how I spend my days.

I created this guide to share what I wish someone had explained to me earlier.

I wanted to share the investing fundamentals I wish someone had explained to me earlier, along with some of the money habits that have helped our family along the way.

Because you don't need to have everything figured out to start building wealth.

**A QUICK DISCLAIMER**

I'm not a licensed financial advisor. This guide shares personal experience and general financial education, not individualized advice. Do your own research and consult a qualified professional when needed.

01 / THE FOUNDATION

5 money habits that helped us build wealth

One of the biggest things I've learned is that building wealth isn't just about what you invest in. It's also about how you manage the money you earn.

Here are five habits that have made a difference for our family.

01

Know where your money goes

We have monthly budget meetings where we review our spending, see how we're doing with our financial goals, and make adjustments where needed.

Understanding where our money goes helps us figure out how much we can realistically save and invest.

02

Build an emergency fund

Life happens, and we've had unexpected expenses. Having money set aside meant we didn't have to rely on debt or sell our investments when emergencies came up.

A good general guideline is to aim for 3–6 months of essential living expenses in an easily accessible savings account. If that feels overwhelming, start small and build from there.

03

Live below your means

We've been fortunate enough to get to a place where we could live on one income, but it definitely took practice.

We had to become more intentional about our spending and learn to live on less than we earned. This became especially important when preparing for my 18-month maternity leave.

04

Automate saving & investing

We set up automatic transfers toward our savings and investments so we're consistently working toward our goals without having to think about it every month.

Even small amounts can add up over time. The important part is creating a habit you can maintain.

05 Get on the same financial page

My husband and I share our finances, discuss larger purchases, and plan our long-term financial goals together. Working toward the same things makes financial decisions easier.

THE BIGGEST LESSON

Building wealth doesn't mean cutting out everything you enjoy. It's about being intentional with your money, creating a financial safety net, and building habits you can stick with.

02 / INVESTING 101

The terms you need to know

When I first started learning about investing, I felt like everyone was speaking a different language. But once I understood a few basic concepts, everything started making a lot more sense.

Here are six investing terms I wish I'd learned sooner.

01 Stock

A stock represents a small piece of ownership in a company.

For example, buying Apple stock means owning a tiny piece of Apple. The value of your stock can go up or down depending on the company and the market.

03 The Stock Market

The stock market is where people buy and sell shares of publicly traded companies.

Stock prices change based on company performance, the economy, and what investors expect to happen in the future.

05 ETF (Exchange-Traded Fund)

Think of an ETF as a basket of investments you can buy together.

Instead of buying individual stocks one by one, you can buy an ETF that holds hundreds or even thousands of companies.

This makes it easier to spread your money across many investments instead of relying on just one company. Some ETFs are broadly diversified, while others focus on specific industries.

02 Bond

A bond is essentially a way of lending money to a government or company. In return, they typically pay you interest and give you your money back at a future date.

Bonds are generally considered less risky than stocks, but they can still lose value, and repayment isn't guaranteed.

04 Market Index (S&P 500)

A market index tracks how a particular group of investments is performing.

For example, the S&P 500 tracks approximately 500 leading publicly traded companies in the United States. When you hear that the S&P 500 is up or down, people are talking about how that group of companies has performed.

06 Compounding Growth

Compound growth happens when your investments earn returns, and those returns have the opportunity to generate even more returns over time.

For example:

$\$100 \xrightarrow{10\% \text{ growth}} \$110 \xrightarrow{10\% \text{ growth}} \121

That's growth on both your original investment and the money it already earned.

THE BIGGEST TAKEAWAY

You don't need to become an expert at picking individual stocks to get started. Understanding these basics can help you make more informed investing decisions.

03 / UNDERSTANDING ETFs

How to Keep Investing Simple

When I first started investing, I thought I'd need to research individual companies and figure out which stocks to buy. But then I learned about ETFs, and investing started to feel a lot more manageable.

What appealed to me was being able to invest in many companies without having to pick every stock myself.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Diversification means spreading your money across different investments instead of relying on one.

If you own one company and it performs poorly, your entire investment is affected. But if you own hundreds of companies, you're not relying on just one.



Not All ETFs Have the Same Risk

ETFs can hold different combinations of stocks and bonds. This is called your asset allocation.

Three Canadian ETF examples that helped me understand asset allocation:



More stocks generally mean greater potential for long-term growth, but also bigger ups and downs. Bonds can help reduce some of those fluctuations, although they carry risks too.

US-Listed Examples

VOO S&P 500 companies
VTI Broad U.S. stock market
VT Stocks from around the world

What We Personally Own

XEQT is the ETF my husband and I invest in for our long-term goals. We're comfortable with the significant fluctuations of an all-stock portfolio.

04 / YOUR INVESTMENT ACCOUNT

Where Do You Actually Invest Your Money?

One thing I didn't understand when I started was the difference between an investment account and an actual investment.

Think of an investment account as a container, and investments as what goes inside it.

For example, you can open a TFSA in Canada or a Roth IRA in the U.S. and hold stocks or ETFs inside.

And each account has different benefits:

IF YOU LIVE IN CANADA

TFSA

Flexible savings and investing; growth and withdrawals are generally tax-free.

RRSP

Retirement savings; contributions may reduce taxes, with withdrawals taxed later.

FHSA

For eligible first-time homebuyers; tax benefits on contributions and qualifying withdrawals.

RESP

For education savings; eligible beneficiaries may get government grants.

IF YOU LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

ROTH IRA

Retirement account with qualified tax-free withdrawals.

TRADITIONAL IRA

Retirement account with possible deductions and generally taxable withdrawals.

401(K)

Employer retirement plan; some employers contribute too.

529 PLAN

Tax-advantaged savings for eligible education expenses.

So which account do you choose?

It depends on your financial goals, when you'll need the money, and the tax rules where you live.

REMEMBER

When you're investing on your own, putting money into an account doesn't mean it's invested. You still need to choose and buy an investment.

05 / YOUR FIRST INVESTMENT

How I'd Invest My First \$100

If I were starting from scratch with \$100, here's what I'd do.

01 Make Sure You're Ready

I'd use money I don't need for bills, emergencies, or upcoming expenses.

Investments can lose value, so I'd focus on money I can leave invested long-term.

02 Choose an Investment Account

I'd research which account suits my goals.

For example, a TFSA in Canada or a Roth IRA in the U.S., depending on eligibility.

03 Choose a Brokerage

A brokerage is a platform that lets you buy and sell investments.

Examples include:

- **Canada:** Wealthsimple, Questrade
- **United States:** Robinhood, Fidelity

I'd compare fees, investment options, and ease of use.

04 Research an ETF

I'd look for an ETF that fits my goals and comfort with risk. Examples include:

- **XEQT (Canada):** Global stocks
- **VFV (Canada):** S&P 500
- **VOO (U.S.):** S&P 500

These are examples, not recommendations.

05 Add Money to Your Account

Once my account is open, I'd transfer \$100 from my bank account.

06 Buy Your First Investment

Search for your chosen ETF using its ticker symbol, like XEQT or VOO.

If your brokerage supports buying by dollar amount, select Buy, enter \$100, review the details, and confirm.

Once your order goes through, you've made your first investment!

What Happens Next?

I wouldn't expect \$100 to make me wealthy overnight. I'd focus on building a habit of investing consistently, even with small amounts.

The goal isn't to start with a lot of money. It's to understand what you're doing and build a habit you can maintain.

06 / WHAT COMES NEXT

Your Wealth-Building Starter Checklist

You don't need to have everything figured out before taking your first step.

Building wealth takes time. Start with these simple actions.

- ☐ **Set a financial goal**
Retirement, your family's future, or more flexibility with your time.
- ☐ **Understand your finances**
Review spending, savings, and high-interest debt.
- ☐ **Build your safety net**
Start an emergency fund; build toward 3–6 months of essentials.
- ☐ **Learn your options**
Understand investing risks, timelines, and different funds.
- ☐ **Research an account**
Explore account rules and compare brokerage options.
- ☐ **Take one small step**
Save, open an account, or invest when you're ready.

Keep Building With Me

I'm still learning and sharing what's working for our family along the way. If you're an ambitious mom who wants to build wealth and create more options for your future, I'd love for you to follow along.

<https://www.instagram.com/cynthiabuilds/>

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