Mrs. Money Sidekick
www.Mrs.MoneySidekick.com

Is It Too Late to Catch Up Financially? Your Quick Checklist

The Benchmarks (Retirement Accounts Only)

- By 30: 1x your salary saved in 401k/IRA
- By 40: 3x your salary saved in 401k/IRA

Remember: these numbers do NOT include your emergency fund, brokerage account, home equity, or 529. Retirement savings only. Treat this as a general reference point, not a grade.

Emergency Fund

- Standard target: 3-6 months of expenses saved
- In a leadership, specialized, or higher-earning role? Consider 6-12 months instead, since these roles often take longer to replace
- Keep this money in a high yield savings account (HYSA), not a regular checking or savings account, so it's actually earning interest while it sits there

Beyond the Basics: Where to Put Extra Money

Once you've got the employer match and emergency fund covered, work through these in order if you have room to save more:

- HSA (if you have a high deductible health plan): triple tax advantage, one of the best accounts available if you qualify
- Max out your 401k contribution, not just the match, if your budget allows
- ESPP (Employee Stock Purchase Plan): if your company offers one, especially with a discount, it's often worth participating
- Roth IRA: max it out if your income qualifies
- Taxable brokerage account: once the above are covered, this is where extra long-term investing money goes

Debt Priority Order

1. High interest debt (credit cards, personal loans over 8-10% interest): tackle first
2. Get your full employer 401k match: this is free money, don't skip it
3. Student loans: pay down aggressively if high interest, steady if lower rate
4. Mortgage: normal to still be carrying this, not a red flag

Catching Up in Your 30s

- Confirm you're getting the full employer match
- Automate your contributions so saving happens without relying on willpower
- Pick ONE thing to fix first, not five things at once
- Stop comparing your timeline to anyone else's

Catching Up in Your 40s

- Remember you likely have 20+ years of investing ahead
- Increase your savings rate by even a few percentage points
- Review where your money is actually going (no shame, just curiosity)
- Prioritize retirement savings over your kids' college fund
- Talk openly with your partner about where things stand

Other Milestones Worth Thinking About

- If you own or plan to buy a home, think about a timeline where your mortgage is paid off before you retire, not right at 67
- Revisit your emergency fund amount whenever your income, role, or expenses change significantly

The One Thing to Remember

A perfect plan you quit in three months does less for you than an imperfect plan you actually stick with for twenty years. Commit to what you can sustain right now. You've still got time.