Consumer Handbook on

Adjustable-Rate Mortgages

Find out how your payment can change over time.

How to use the booklet

When you first get a loan secured by an adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM), you receive a booklet like this one. When you apply for an ARM loan, you receive a Loan Estimate. You can request and receive multiple Loan Estimates from competing lenders to find your best deal.

You may want to have your Loan Estimate handy for any loan you are considering as you work through this booklet. We reference a sample Loan Estimate throughout the booklet to help you apply the information to your situation.

You can find more information about ARMs at **cfpb.gov/about-us/ama**. You'll also find other mortgage-related CFPB resources, facts, and tools to help you take control of the home buying options.

About the CFPB

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau regulates the offering and provision of consumer financial products and services under the federal consumer financial laws and educates the and empowers consumers to make better informed financial decisions.

This booklet, Adjustable-Rate Mortgages Handbook, is required to comply with federal law pursuant to 12 U.S.C. 2604 and 12 CFR 1026.19(b)(1).

How can this booklet help you?

This booklet can help you decide whether an adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM) is the right choice for you and it helps you take control of the home buying process.

Your lender may have already provided you with a copy of Your Home Loan Toolkit. You can also download the Toolkit from the CFPB's Buying a House Guide at **cfpb.gov/buy-a-house/**.

After you finish this booklet:

- You'll understand how an ARM works and whether it's the right choice for you.
- You'll know how to review important documents when you apply for and ARM.
- You'll understand the risks that come with different types of ARMs.

An ARM is a mortgage with an interest rate that changes, or "adjusts" throughout the loan.

With an ARM, the interest rate and monthly payment may start out low. However, both the rate and the payment can increase very quickly.

Consider an ARM if you can afford increases in your monthly payment even to the maximum amount.

Is an ARM right for you?

ARMs come with the risk of higher payments in the future that you might not be able to predict. But in some situations, an ARM might make sense for you. If you are considering an ARM, be sure to understand the tradeoffs.

COMPARE	FIXED-RATE MORTGAGE	ADJUSTABLE-RATE MORTGAGE
CONSIDER THIS OPTION IF	You prefer predictable payments, or You plan to keep your home for a long period of time	You are confident you can afford increases in your monthly payment even to the maximum amount, or You plan to sell your home within a short period of time
INTEREST RATE	Set when you take the loan Stays the same for the entire loan term	Based on an index that changes May start out lower than a fixed-rate mortgage but you bear the risk of increases throughout your loan
INTEREST RATE	Set when you take the loan Stays the same for the entire loan term	Based on an index that changes May start out lower than a fixed-rate mortgage but you bear the risk of increases throughout your loan
MONTHLY PAYMENT	Principal and interest payment stays the same over the live of your loan You know the total you will pay in principal and interest over the life the loan	Initial principal and interest payment amount remains in effect for a limited period You can't know in advance how much total interest you will pay because your interest rate changes If you can't afford the increased payments, you may lose your home to foreclosure

Tip

Don't count on being able to refinance before your interest rate and monthly payment do increase. You might not qualify for refinancing if the value of your home goes down or if something unexpected changes your financial situation, like a job loss or medical costs.

Learn about how ARMs work

As you decide whether to move ahead with an ARM, you should understand how they work and how your housing costs can be affected.

Interest rate = index + margin

The interest rate on an ARM has two parts: the index and the margin.

INDEX

An index is a measure of interest rates generally that reflects trends in the overall economy. Different lenders use different indexes for their ARM programs.

Common indexes includes the U.S. prime rate and the Constant Maturity Treasury (CMT) rate. Talk with your lender to find out more about the index they use, which is also shown on your Loan Estimate.

MARGIN

The margin is an extra percentage that the lender adds to the index.

You can shop around to different lenders to find the lowest combination of the index plus the margin. Your Loan Estimate shows the index and the margin being offered to you.

Use your Loan Estimate to understand your ARM

When you apply for a mortgage, the lender gives you a document called a Loan Estimate. It describes the important features of the loan the lender is offering you. This section illustrates the parts of a loan estimate that are specific features of ARM loans. An interactive, online version of a Loan Estimate sample is available at **cfpb.gov/arm-explainer/**.

Loan Terms

INTEREST RATE

The Loan Estimate shows the initial interest rate you pay at the beginning of your loan term. This rise also shows how often your rate can change and how high it can go.

MONTHLY PRINCIPAL & INTEREST

The Loan Estimate shows the initial monthly principal and interest payment you'll make if your account stays the same. Your principal is the money that you originally agreed to pay back on your loan. Interest is a cost you pay for borrow the principal. The initial principal and interest payment amount for an ARM is set only for the initial period and may change after that.

THE TALK

You might hear, "An ARM makes sense because you can refinance the loan before your interest rate and monthly payment increase."

Ask yourself, a spouse or a loved one:

"What if the market value of the home goes down?"

What if one financial situation or credit score goes damaged by something unexpected like a job loss or illness?"

"If we can't refinance at a better rate, can we afford the maximum interest rate and payment increase under this loan?"

Loan Terms		Can this amount increase after closing?	
Loan Amount	$216,000	**NO**	
Interest Rate	3%	**YES**	Adjusts **every year** starting in year 6 Can go **as high as 8%** in year 8 See **AIR Table** for details
Monthly Principal & Interest See Projected Payments Below for Your Total Monthly Payment	$910.66	**YES**	Adjusts **every year** starting in year 6 Can go **as high as $1,467** in year 8
		Does the loan have these features?	
Prepayment Penalty		**NO**	
Balloon Payment		**NO**	

Example of "Loan terms" section. Find this on page 1 of your own Loan Estimate.

Projected Payments				
Payment Calculation	**Years 1-5**	**Years 6**	**Years 7**	**Years 8-30**
Principal & Interest	$910.66	$838 min - $1,125 max	$838 min - $1,208 max	$838 min - $1,467 max
Mortgage Insurance	+ 99	+ 99	+ 99	+ 99
Estimated Escrow Amount can increase over time	+ 341	+ 341	+ 341	+ 341
Estimated Total Monthly Payment	$1,290	$1,217 - $1,565	$1,217 - $1,729	$1,175 - $1,808
Estimated Taxes, Insurance & Assessments Amount can increase over time	$341 a month	**This estimate includes** Property taxes Homeowner's insurance City dues See Section G on page 2 for escrowed property costs. You must pay for other property costs separately.		**In escrow?** **YES** **YES**

Example of "Projected payments" section. Find this on page 1 of your own Loan Estimate.

Projected Payments

PRINCIPAL & INTEREST

The monthly principal and interest payment on your ARM is likely to change over the loan term. The section to see how your payment can change based on your loan's terms is

ESTIMATED TOTAL MONTHLY PAYMENT

Review this row to see the total minimum and maximum monthly payments. The payments include mortgage insurance, property taxes, homeowner's insurance, and any additional property assessments or other escrow items. Learn more about these mortgage terms at **cfpb.gov/mortgage/escrow/**.

Keep in mind that other parts of your monthly and annual housing costs can change, such as your property taxes and homeowners insurance payments.

THE TALK

Talk over how your financial life could be affected if your ARM payment or interest increases. In future years, you might face money decisions like:

Job Changes

School or other education expenses

Medical needs and expenses

Because ARM adjustments are unpredictable, you might have less or more financial flexibility for other parts of your life.

Adjustable Interest Rate (AIR) Table

You should read and understand the AIR table calculators before committing to an ARM. It's important to know how your interest rate changes over the life of your loan.

INDEX + MARGIN

Your lender is required to show you how your interest rate is calculated, which is determined by the index and margin on your loan.

INITIAL INTEREST RATE

This is the interest rate at the beginning of your loan. The initial interest rate changes to the index plus the margin or your first adjustment (subject to the limits on interest rate changes). Your loan version tells you your new payment amount sooner to eight months in advance, so you can budget for it or shop for a new loan.

CHANGE FREQUENCY

This indicates when the interest rate on your loan will change. Your loan servicer sends you advance notices of changes.

LIMITS ON INTEREST RATE CHANGES

This shows the highest amount your interest rate can increase when there is a change.

Adjustable Interest Rate (AIR) Table	
Index + Margin	Your Cost = 2.5%
Initial Interest Rate	3%
Fully Indexed Interest Rate	2.5%+ 3%
Change Frequency	
First Change	Beginning of 61st month
Subsequent Changes	Every 12 months after first change
Limits on Interest Rate Changes	
First Change	2%
Subsequent Changes	2%

Example of "AIR table" section. Find this on page 2 of your own Loan Estimate

"TEASER" RATES

Some lenders offer a "teaser," "Start," or "Discounted" rate that is lower than their fully indexed rate. When the teaser rate ends, you can face rates on the fully indexed rate. Don't assume that a loan with your a teaser Tale is a good one for you. Not everyone's budget can accommodate this.

Consider this example:

A lender's fully indexed rate is 4.5% (The index is 2% and the margin is 2.5%)

The loan also features a "teaser" rate of 3%

Even if the index doesn't change, your interest rates will increase from 3% to 4.5% when your teaser rate expires.

Compare your ARM offers

Stop for at least three loan offers, and fill in the blanks below using the information on your Loan Estimates.

	ARM OFFER 1	ARM OFFER 2	FIXED- RATE OFFER
Lender Name			
Loan Amount	$	$	$
Initial interest rate	%	%	%
Initial principal and interest payment	$	$	$
Index			
Margin			
How long will the initial interest rate and initial payment apply?			
How high can my interest rate go?	%	%	%
How high can my principal and interest payment go?	$	$	$

My best loan offer is: _____

THE TALK

You are in control of theater or not to proceed with an ARM. If you prefer to proceed with a fixed-rate mortgage, here is one way to start the conversation with a lender:

"A fixed-rate mortgage seems to be a better fit for me. Let's talk about what you can offer and how it compares to other loans I may be able to get."

Review your lender's ARM program disclosure

Your lender gives you an ARM program disclosure when you give you an application. This is the lender's opportunity to tell you about their different ARM loans and how the loans work. The index and margin can differ from one lender to another, so it is helpful to compare offers from different lenders.

Generally, the index your lender uses won't change after you get your loan, but your loan servicer may allow the lender to switch to a different index in some situations.

RATIOS FACTS

Review your program disclosure and ask your lender questions to understand their ARM loan offerings:

- How are the interest rate and payment determined?
- Does this loan have interest-rate caps (that is, limits on interest-rate changes)?
- How often do the interest rate and payment adjust?
- What index is used and where is it published?
- Is the initial interest rate lower than the fully indexed rate?
- What type of information is provide in notices of adjustment and when do I receive them?

Ask about other options offered by your lender

CONVERSION OPTIONS

Your loan agreement may include a clause that lets you convert the ARM to a fixed-rate mortgage in the future.

When you convert, the new rate is generally set using a formula given in your loan documents. The fixed rate may be higher or lower than interest rates available to you in the market at that time. Also your lender may charge you a conversion fee. Ask your lender whether the loan you are being offered has a conversion feature and how it works.

SPECIAL FEATURES

You can shop around to understand what special ARM features may be available from different lenders.

Not all programs are the same. Talk with your lender to find out if there's anything special about their ARM programs that you may find valuable.

Check your ARM for features that could pose risks

Some types of ARMs have features that can reduce your payments in the short term but may include flaws in the ARM loan that guarantee loan. Review your loan terms and make sure that you understand the fees and how your rate and payment may change. **Lower payments at the beginning could mean higher fees or much higher payments later.**

THE TALK

If your Loan Estimate shows points, ask your lender:

"What is my interest rate if I choose not to pay points?"

"How much money do I pay in points? And, compared to the total reduction in my payments during the initial period, am I coming out ahead?"

Can I see a revised Loan Estimate with the points removed and the interest rate adjusted?"

Paying points reduce your initial interest rate

Lenders can offer you a lower rate in exchange for paying loan fees at closing, or points.

With an ARM, paying points often reduces your interest rate only until the end of the initial period the reduction most likely does not apply over the life of your loan.

If you are using an ARM to refinance a loan, points are often rolled into your new loan amount. You might not realize you are paying points unless you look carefully. Points are disclosed on the top of Page 2 of your Loan Estimate.

Lenders may give you the option to pay points, but you never have to take that option. To figure out if you have a good deal, compare your costs in points with the amount that you will save with a lower interest rate.

Consumer handbook on Adjustable-Rate Mortgages

ASK YOUR LENDER

How high can my payment go?

How high can my interest rate go?

How long is my initial principal and interest rate guaranteed?

ASK YOURSELF

Have I shopped around to compare ARMs and fixed-rate loans?

If an ARM has a lower initial interest rate than a fixed-rate mortgage, is paying less money now worth the risk of an increase later?

Can I afford the highest payment possible with the ARM if I can't sell the home, or refinance into a lower rate, before the increase?

ONLINE TOOLS

CFPB website
cfpb.gov

Answers to common questions
cfpb.gov/ask-fpc

Tools and resources for home buyers
cfpb.gov/owning-a-home

Talk to a housing counselor
cfpb.gov/find-a-housing-counselor

Submit a complaint
cfpb.gov/complaint