

How Do I Buy Bitcoin or Ethereum for the First Time?

A Step-by-Step Guide to Making Your First Crypto Purchase Correctly

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Buying Bitcoin or Ethereum for the first time takes less than thirty minutes if you follow the right steps in the right order. This guide covers the complete process from start to finish.

Step	Action	Time Required
01	Create your exchange account	5 minutes
02	Enable two-factor authentication	5 minutes
03	Complete identity verification — KYC	5 — 30 minutes
04	Deposit funds	Instant — 3 days
05	Make your first purchase	2 minutes
06	Transfer to cold storage — hardware wallet	When holdings grow

Before You Start — Three Things to Decide

How much will you invest? Decide on your initial amount before opening any account. This should be risk capital only — money you can afford to lose without affecting your financial stability. Most exchanges allow purchases as small as \$10 to \$25.

Bitcoin or Ethereum — or both? For a first purchase, Bitcoin is the recommended starting point — the most proven, most liquid, most institutionally recognized asset. Ethereum is an equally legitimate choice for exposure to the smart contract ecosystem. Many investors split their first purchase between both.

Which exchange will you use? For most beginners — Coinbase for US and European investors, Crypto.com for global investors. If you have not already decided, review the exchange comparison guide before proceeding.

Step 1 — Create Your Exchange Account

Go to the official website of your chosen exchange — typed manually into your browser, never through a link in an email or social media post. Click Create Account, enter your email address and a strong unique password of at least sixteen characters. Store it in a password manager. Verify your email address before proceeding.

Step 2 — Enable Two-Factor Authentication

Before depositing any funds, enable 2FA using an authenticator app — Google Authenticator, Authy, or Aegis. Scan the QR code with the authenticator app. Store the backup codes in a secure location. Do not use SMS-based 2FA if an authenticator app option is available.

Step 3 — Complete Identity Verification — KYC

All regulated exchanges require KYC before you can deposit or purchase. You will typically need: your full legal name, date of birth, residential address, and a government-issued photo ID. Complete this immediately after account creation — unverified accounts may have withdrawal restrictions placed on them.

Step 4 — Deposit Funds

Deposit the amount you decided on in the preparation phase. Three main options:

Bank transfer — lowest fee, takes one to three business days to clear.

Debit card — instant deposit, higher fee of 1.5% to 3.99%.

Credit card — available on some exchanges but generally not recommended — classified as cash advances with additional fees.

Step 5 — Make Your First Purchase

Navigate to the Buy section. Select Bitcoin — BTC — or Ethereum — ETH. Enter the amount in your local currency. Review the asset, amount, exchange rate, and fees carefully before confirming. Your BTC or ETH will appear in your exchange wallet within seconds.

Step 6 — Do Not Stop at the Exchange

Leaving your assets on the exchange means the exchange controls the private keys. As your holdings grow to a level that would be materially impactful if lost, transfer them to a hardware wallet. Purchase directly from the manufacturer — Ledger or Trezor — set it up, write down your seed phrase, and

transfer your assets.

Common Mistakes First-Time Buyers Make

Buying the wrong asset. Bitcoin is BTC. Ethereum is ETH. Bitcoin Cash — BCH — and Bitcoin SV — BSV — are different assets. Ethereum Classic — ETC — is not Ethereum — ETH. Always verify the ticker symbol before confirming any purchase.

Sending to the wrong address. Always double-check the full destination address. Send a small test amount first when sending to a new address. Crypto transactions are irreversible.

Panic selling on first volatility. Bitcoin and Ethereum regularly experience 10% to 20% corrections within bull markets. New investors who have not experienced this before frequently panic sell during normal corrections — locking in losses on assets that typically recover within days or weeks.

Telling everyone immediately. Publicly sharing that you own cryptocurrency creates social engineering risk. Keep your crypto holdings private.

Key Takeaway

Buying Bitcoin or Ethereum for the first time is a straightforward six-step process — create an account, enable 2FA, complete KYC, deposit funds, make the purchase, and secure the assets in cold storage. The technical process is simple. The discipline to follow each step correctly, avoid the common mistakes, and hold through initial volatility is where most first-time investors either build the foundation of a serious portfolio or abandon the process before it has a chance to compound.