

Managing financial stress

Do finances keep you awake at night? If so, you're not alone. More than 75 percent of Americans say money is a big source of stress, according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

Although we can't always change our financial problems right away, we can learn to cope with this type of stress. This can help you stay healthier and learn to deal with challenges in a positive way.



If you're stressed about money, try these tips:



Remain calm and make a plan.

It can be easy to get caught up in the panic of the moment when a problem arises. A sudden expense needed for an emergency or stories about a "bad economy" in the news can make things feel hopeless. Instead, think about small steps you can take now to improve your budget. This may be writing down a few specific ways you can cut back on expenses. Or, look at your past spending and make a plan to cut back on things you can do without for now.



Look at the positive side of being thrifty.

Eating meals at home instead of at a restaurant can be a fun family bonding time. Have everyone help prepare the meal or pick out their favorite dish for the weekly menu. Can't afford a fitness membership? Exercise with a family member or friend at home and make it fun.



Be proud of progress.

If you saved \$5 by making your coffee at home rather than buying it at a coffee shop, that's a step in the right direction. Think about the little ways you can save money and how they add up over time. These small successes can get you to your goal.



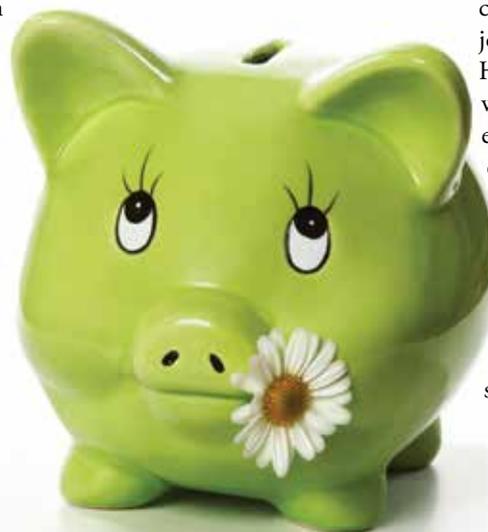
If you can't pay your bills, ask for help.

Banks, utilities and credit card companies will often give you extra time to pay if you're in a financial crisis. It doesn't hurt to call and ask.



Identify unhealthy behaviors.

If you deal with stress by drinking alcohol, smoking or gambling, this will often make matters worse. Not only do these habits cost more money, but they can cost you your health, job and relationships. Healthy ways to cope with stress include exercise, deep breathing, eating a balanced diet, listening to music or calling a friend. If you need help with unhealthy behaviors, ask your doctor or look into community support groups.



Source: American Psychological Association