

Health and Wellness

News You Can Use

Reduce your financial stress to improve your overall wellness

There are a lot of reasons that you may be feeling some financial stress. When you are stressed out, it affects other aspects of your life. You may have a hard time concentrating at work or completing tasks at home or focusing on your relationships because you are worried about finances. Creating a plan and taking action (even small steps) to improve your finances can reduce your worry, improve your health and better your relationships. Here are a few things you can do now to relieve your financial stress and put your mind at ease.

Create a budget and stick to it

Part of the reason so many folks get overwhelmed by their finances is that they have no idea where their money is going. And that's where a budget can help. To start, map out all of your monthly costs, from your rent or mortgage payment to that \$10 subscription. Next, factor in less frequent expenses such as holiday gifts and insurance renewals, and divide them evenly across 12 months. From there, it's a simple matter of making sure the amount you're planning to spend each month doesn't exceed what your paychecks allow for. If it does, or if you find that you're dangerously close to the edge, you'll need to make some adjustments to avoid going over your budget. Your budget will give you the control that you need over your finances.

Cut unnecessary expenses and reduce debt

While making a budget, you may uncover some unwelcome truths about your financial situation. There very well could be areas you're spending money that seem like no big deal, but add up over time. You may be surprised at what you could cut out of your budget and not miss.

Reducing debt should be a top priority. Certain kinds of debt (mortgages, student loans, etc.) can actually be good in the sense that they help you build your credit rating. If you have excellent credit and you feel like your rates are too high on your "good" debt, you may be able to cut costs simply by restructuring your "good" credit loans at lower rates.

When it comes to "bad" credit — revolving credit or credit cards — the only solution is to pay it off as quickly as possible. Here are some tips for accelerating debt reduction:

- Consolidate credit card balances onto the lowest-interest card possible
- Always pay more than the minimum balance

If you are paying off more than one card, always pay the maximum amount possible on the card with the highest interest rate. Once you've tackled your debt, you should find yourself with extra money at the end of the month.



Establish an emergency fund

An emergency fund is money you have set aside to cover unexpected expenses and financial emergencies. Although a car repair can be expensive and stressful, if you know you can tap into your emergency fund to cover it, a lot of the stress will go away. It is also easier to use the money in your budget the way you planned if you know you have the extra money in the bank ready to cover the unexpected emergencies that may crop up. You should have at least \$1,000 in the bank until you are out of debt and after that you should work up to about six months of your expenses.

Most Americans aren't even close to having a fully loaded emergency fund, but if you work on building your savings over time, you'll get there.

Get outside help

If you are really struggling with getting a handle on your budget and spending issues, do not be afraid to get outside help. You can take classes on basic money management and investing that will help you plan out a budget and do the things you need to succeed

financially. A financial planner can help you create a long-term investing strategy that will help you plan for retirement. It is important to realize that you do not have to face the problems alone. If you are feeling overwhelmed by debt, you can also use a credit counseling service. You can also take a financial class that coaches you through budgeting and other aspects of your personal finances.

Be properly insured

Sometimes, even the healthiest among us get sick or injured unexpectedly. That's why it's crucial to have the right sort of insurance in place — for your sake, as well as that of your family.

You might think you're relatively young and healthy, and that you're better off saving the money you'd otherwise spend on a premium. But if something happens, you and your family might suffer financially. That's why it pays to spend some money on the right insurance, whether it's a better health plan, short-term and long-term disability or a modest life insurance policy. Knowing you have these protections in place can help alleviate some of the financial anxiety you might otherwise be experiencing.

Nurture your physical health

You always need to take good care of yourself physically and that goes double when you're stressed. Eat well and try to avoid drinking and eating too much. Get in a walk or two every day and drink plenty of water.

Financial stress can have major effects on your health. Stress, in general, can cause heart attacks, strokes and many other serious health issues regardless of the source. Be proactive and consult the source of the stress. Spend some of your time working towards changing that. After you make a budget, take a break before you come back to tally up the totals. Once you do get some numbers down, don't panic! Remember, your health is your most valuable asset.

Recipe

Parmesan scalloped potatoes with spinach

Ingredients

- 2½ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, cut into ¼-inch slices (about 8 cups)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 small onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon white or black pepper
- 2½ cups low-fat milk
- 1 pound chopped frozen spinach, thawed
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided



Directions

1. Position racks in upper and lower third of oven; preheat to 425°F.
2. Toss potatoes with 1 tablespoon oil in a large bowl until well coated. Divide between 2 large baking sheets and spread in an even layer. Roast, rotating the pans from

top to bottom about halfway through, until tender and beginning to brown, about 20 to 25 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onion; cook, stirring frequently, until very soft and golden brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Add garlic; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute more. Add flour and salt and pepper; cook, stirring for 1 minute more. Add milk; cook, stirring and scraping up any brown bits at the bottom of the pan. Increase heat to medium high; cook, stirring, until the sauce thickens and bubbles, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Squeeze spinach to remove any excess moisture; stir into the sauce.
4. When the potatoes are done, remove them from the oven. Preheat the broiler. Transfer half the potatoes to a 2-quart broiler-safe baking dish. Spread half the sauce over the potatoes and top with ½ cup cheese. Add the remaining potatoes and top with the remaining sauce and cheese. Broil, watching carefully, until the sauce is bubbling and the cheese is beginning to brown, 1 to 5 minutes, depending on your broiler. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

Source: EatingWell.com