

# Managing Financial Stress

Financial stress is a part of life for most people. According to a 2019 national survey, about 60% of adults report that money is a significant source of personal stress. Recently, many of us may have been experiencing more financial stress than normal, as we adjust to changing work schedules and business closings.

Although financial stress may be unavoidable for most, we can control how we address it. Consider the following suggestions to manage your financial stress.

## Identify the Source

Start by identifying the top two or three financial problems that you face. These could be having too much debt, having trouble saving money, or overspending. Limit the list to two or three problems so that you do not become overwhelmed.

## Make a Plan

Once you have taken inventory, make a plan of attack. Focus on the most pressing of your financial issues first. Work out a step-by-step plan to reach your goal. It is important that you include small steps to address your financial problems so that they feel manageable.

Do not move on to the next goal until you feel that you have a handle on your new financial behavior. This will limit stress and make you a more effective problem solver. Work through the list one problem at a time, while working through each problem one step at a time. Small change is the key to success.

## Recognize How You Deal with Stress

Many of us have unhealthy habits or coping mechanisms that we turn to when times get hard. For instance, many people smoke or overeat when they feel stress. Unfortunately, these behaviors usually make our stress worse; they are bad for our health, and they cause us to spend more money! As a result, our financial stress only seems to get worse.

Consider replacing these behaviors with a healthier way of coping. For some people, this might mean taking a walk outside. Others may find that their stress is reduced when they exercise or meditate. Find what works for you.

## Ask for Help

People are more effective at initiating and maintaining change when they have a support system that can hold them accountable and offer emotional support. You could seek professional help, or reach out to family and friends for support. Explain your problem and your plan to address it. Sharing specifics will help them to be more effective in supporting you to change your financial situation.

Most of all remember this: Addressing financial stress is a process. It takes time. But with a specific action plan, you can begin managing your financial stress today.

**References:**

“Stress in America” Survey (American Psychological Association, 2019)  
<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2019/stress-america-2019.pdf>

**Source:**

- Kelly May, Senior Extension Associate for Family Finance and Resource Management
- Jennifer Hunter, Ph.D., Family Finance and Resource Management