

FINANCIAL HEALTH CHECKLIST

Taking control of your financial life is not an easy task. It involves planning, dedication and some serious behavior change. But creating a plan and sticking to it prepares you for both short- and long-term financial well-being. Use this checklist to get started on your path to financial health.



1. Set a savings goal

The earlier you start planning for your financial future, the more your money compounds over time. Find out how much you should save to retire comfortably with this retirement calculator: money.cnn.com/retirement.



2. Track your purchases

Simply keeping track of your spending is a great first step to building a budget. Free tools like Mint.com can help you automatically track in categories like food, rent and gas and help you set budgets and alerts.



3. Cancel unused services

Many services have monthly charges and automated annual renewals that you may be charged for without realizing it. Catalog your subscriptions and cancel the ones you don't use or could do without.



4. Tackle credit card debt

Get rid of one of the most burdensome debts you can have: credit card debt. With interest rates often topping 18%, monthly payments usually only cover interest and don't touch the debt itself.



5. Pay yourself first

Automatically allocate a portion of your paycheck to go into your personal savings and retirement accounts. When the money is taken out of your paycheck before it hits your bank account, you won't miss it.



6. Contribute to your company's 401(k)

Be sure to contribute the maximum to your 401(k) – especially if your employer matches your contributions. That's free money in your pocket and less taxable income. Cha-ching!



7. Check your credit report

Maintaining good credit means you'll pay lower interest rates when you borrow to buy big purchases like a house or a car. Check your report for free once a year at AnnualCreditReport.com.



8. Set up automatic payments

Pay your bills on time with automated services. Setting up automatic payments saves both time and postage, and helps you avoid late fees.



9. Ask for a better deal

Could you pay less for the same cable, landline or wireless service? Try renegotiating how much you pay or finding a competitor with a better rate.



10. Establish an emergency fund

Make sure you have funds set aside in an easily accessible account in case of an emergency. That way, in the unlikely instance that you need to make a large healthcare, car or other unplanned payment, you can avoid paying fees to access your retirement account or going into debt.