



4 Steps to Improved Financial Wellness

Financial wellness can mean different things to different people. In general, though, it is a state in which you can pay your bills, cover unexpected expenses, and save for long-term goals like retirement. Achieving financial wellness can help to ease your mind and relieve money-related stress.

Most of us can stand to make at least some improvements in our financial wellness. These steps will help.

- 1. Create a budget.** A budget will help you differentiate between needs and wants, identify unneeded spending, and plan for short- and long-term goals.
- 2. Build an emergency fund.** If you can't cover the unexpected costs that inevitably come up (car repairs, medical bills, etc.), it will be tough to gain financial ground. Most experts recommend setting aside three to six months' worth of living expenses. If that seems overwhelming, aim for one month's worth at first.
- 3. Pay off credit card debt.** Once you have an emergency fund, start to pay off any credit card or other high-interest-rate debt. One method is to begin with the debt that carries the highest interest rate, and pay it off as aggressively as you can. Then move to the debt with the next-highest interest rate.

- 4. Save for retirement.** The sooner you start saving for retirement, the more time your investments have to grow. Ask your employer if they offer a 401(k) or another type of retirement plan. If they do, and if the plan includes an employer match, make sure you save at least enough to get the full match.

Keep your eye on the ball

As your financial worries ease a bit, it may be tempting to fudge on some of your financial wellness plans. By staying committed, you'll achieve your goals and enjoy the lasting benefits of financial wellness.

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How to Build Your Budget

A budget can be a powerful tool. It can help you understand where your money goes, find ways to save more, and achieve your financial goals.

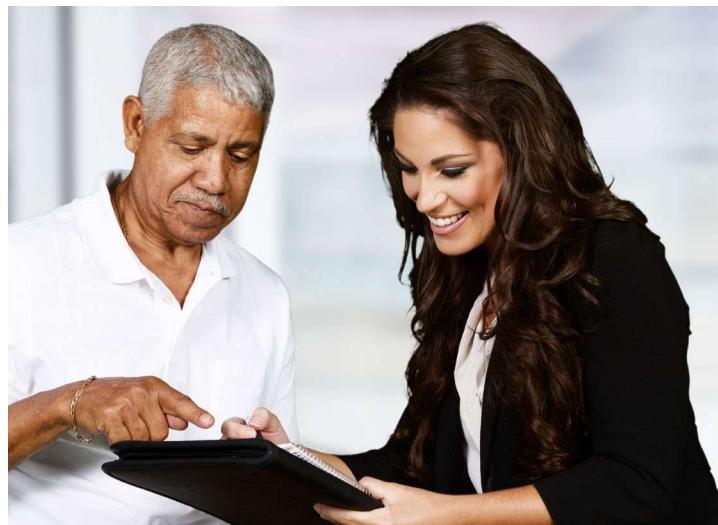
A budget can be as simple or complex as you want. Here's how to get started.

- 1. Track your expenses.** First, understand how you are currently spending your money. Look at recent bills, bank statements, and credit card statements to get the details.
- 2. Put your spending into categories.** Examples include housing, food, transportation, utilities, entertainment, etc.
- 3. Add up your income.** Next, add up your household's monthly take-home pay. (That means the money that actually gets to your bank account after taxes, insurance, and other deductions.)
- 4. Calculate the difference.** Subtract your monthly expenses from your monthly income.
 - If there is money left over, put as much as you can toward your first and most important financial goal (such as setting up an emergency fund).
 - If you are falling short, find places to cut back on spending.

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Free apps can help

There are plenty of free apps that can make it easier to manage your budget. Some of the top apps include Mint, Honeydue, and Goodbudget.*



* The free apps listed above not endorsed by Gallagher and are just a few examples of many different budget apps available.

1. <https://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/saving-and-budgeting/articles/simple-and-free-budgeting-tools>
2. <https://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/saving-and-budgeting/articles/simple-and-free-budgeting-tools>



Simple Ways to Save More

Whether it's for an emergency fund, college, retirement, or just a special treat, we all need to boost our savings from time to time, but that can be easier said than done.

If you need to find extra money in your existing budget, these ideas may help:

- **Read your statements.** Take a close look at your credit card and bank statements. You may find expenses you didn't even know you had—such as recurring charges for services you no longer need.
- **Raise your deductibles.** Review your auto and home insurance policies to see if you can raise your deductibles. For example, bumping up your auto insurance deductible could save you hundreds of dollars a year. Just make sure you have enough emergency cash on hand to cover a claim in the event of an accident.
- **Use the library.** Libraries offer a wealth of free services—classes, e-books, audiobooks, print books, and more.
- **Be smart about credit cards.** Used properly, credit cards can be a great convenience and even help you save money. Choose cards that offer rewards programs tailored to your spending habits. For example, some give higher rebates for gasoline purchases. Also, make sure you pay the full balance on time every month to avoid late fees and interest charges.
- **Bring your own lunch or snacks.** Whether it's at work or in the car, bringing your own food can help you save a surprising amount over time.

Track your savings

Keep a log of the money you have saved. Seeing your progress may motivate you to find even more ways to save.

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CHICKEN TACO CASSEROLE

Prep Time	Cook Time	Servings
15 minutes	30 minutes	10

Ingredients

- 4 cups boneless, skinless chicken breasts (cooked and shredded)
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 (24 oz) jar of salsa
- 1 (15 oz) can black beans (drained and rinsed)
- 2 green onions (sliced)
- 1 (15 oz) can of corn
- 1 (1 oz) taco seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 (10.5 oz) can of cream of chicken soup (drained)
- 2 1/2 cups cheddar cheese (shredded and divided)
- 1 (13 oz) bag tortilla chips (crushed by hand)

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Then prepare a 9 x 13 baking dish by coating it with a non stick cooking spray.
2. Add chicken, sour cream, salsa, black beans, green onions, corn, taco seasoning, black pepper, cream of chicken soup and 1 cup of cheddar cheese in a large bowl. Mix until well combined.
3. Crush chips by hand and spread half of them on the bottom of the prepared baking dish. Then spread half of the chicken mixture over the crushed chips.
4. Repeat and top with remaining cheddar cheese.
5. Bake for 30 minutes, until bubbly and cheese is completely melted.



Nutrition Facts

Calories	573
Total Fat	19g
Sodium	697mg
Carbohydrate	73g
Total Sugars	9g
Dietary Fiber	12g
Protein	35g