

# Figuring Out Your Finances in the “New Normal” of the COVID-19 Pandemic

*This article is part of our series, **COVID-19 and Your Financial Health**, which addresses COVID-19 (Coronavirus), how it impacts your financial health, and tips to stay financially well during this pandemic.*

*As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, millions of Americans have found themselves experiencing unexpected setbacks, in both their personal finances and their professional lives. Even as the country slowly makes its way out of preventative shutdowns, the future stability of our economy is uncertain, which is taking its toll on the country’s collective mental health. One study reported that 69% of adult Americans have reported an increase in financially-related stress as a result of the virus<sup>1</sup>, which is to be expected after the amount of turmoil our country has faced in the past months. If you find yourself worrying about your finances as a result of the current crisis, here are some ways that you can alleviate that stress and still take care of yourself on a reduced budget.*

## Check In With Your Finances

### Defer Payments

As a result of COVID-19 and the subsequent nationwide shutdowns, many institutions were, and still are, allowing for certain payments to be deferred. If you’re in the process of repaying student loans or making debt payments, reaching out to your lender or servicer directly is a great way to figure out what options are available to you in terms of payment deferrals. With company guidelines and legislature changing to keep up with the volatility of the current crisis, it is easy to lose track of which policies are still active and applicable. This is where your provider or servicer can help!

Additionally, you can always reach out to your landlord about adjusting or deferring rent payments if needed, or talk directly with your financial institution on what kind of benefits they are offering their users when it comes to regularly scheduled monthly payments. Make sure you’re always paying attention to when these grace periods and payment deferrals end so you don’t miss important payments as the country starts to reopen.

### Reframe Your Budget

The best way to tackle the “what-ifs” and anxiety surrounding your finances is to know exactly where you stand. Though you may feel a sense of dread every time you open your checking account or budgeting tool, ripping off the metaphorical band-aid and getting a clearer idea of how COVID-19 has impacted your finances can save you from sleepless nights. Whether you want to go old school and list out all your expenses with a pen and paper, or utilize virtual tools like apps, online spreadsheets, and budgeting calculators, laying out exactly what you spend each month, week, or year is the first step towards improving your financial wellness.

Once you have a clearer understanding of how your current situation has been impacted by COVID-19, you’ll be able to take steps toward trimming out unnecessary expenses and redirecting your money towards essential payments. There may be forgotten monthly subscriptions or once-in-a-while treats that turned into habits lurking in the background of your budget, directing your income away from savings or important bills. Though a comprehensive review like this might

mean taking a hard look at where your budget was lacking, determining what expenses are actually necessary now that you may have found yourself facing different financial challenges should be a priority.

### Increase Savings Contributions

Though this may be difficult to implement depending on your personal financial situation, if you are fortunate enough to still have some sort of income during this time, then increasing how much you're saving for the future is especially important now. Because we still don't fully understand the scope and duration of this global pandemic, being proactive with increasing your savings contributions can help you create a safety net in case you find your financial situation changing once again. Remember, even the smallest amount counts, so putting away the \$15 you may have spent on a food delivery order now could help cover filling up your tank with gas or paying a bill in the future.

### Check In With Yourself

Now that you've taken some steps towards alleviating some of your financial worries, make sure you also take some time to check in with your mental well-being. The stress of this much uncertainty can take a major toll on our mental and physical health, making it especially important to take care of yourself now. Though "self-care" may seem like a buzzword being thrown around on social media, it can actually be a vital step in making sure you're doing all you can to stay well. Many associate self-care with expensive face masks and spa treatments, but there are actually a variety of free and budget friendly ways to participate in this important trend.

### Get Outdoors

One of the best ways to boost your mood without spending a dime is going outside. In fact, it has been proven in multiple studies that spending time outside greatly reduces stress by alleviating the effects of external pressures, like deadlines and pressing tasks<sup>2</sup>. It may seem like a simple fix, but walking or even sitting outdoors can feel like such a treat, especially now as COVID-19 has kept so many of us homebound. A breath of fresh air after a deep dive into your budget could be the perfect way to alleviate some of your financial anxiety while giving yourself much needed time to recharge.

### Meditate

Meditation is another great way to bring a sense of calm into your life during chaotic times. Delete or deactivate your social media apps, turn off the news, and take a moment of much needed silence. If guided meditation is what you're looking for, then turn to Youtube for instructional videos, or apps like Calm and Mindspace that offer free trials. Even if you're living on a scaled-back budget, meditation is a low-cost, if not free, way to take care of yourself.

### Reach Out To Your Healthcare Provider

Finally, if you're seeking care that goes beyond the scope of little things you can do yourself, be sure to reach out to your healthcare provider for recommendations on what kind of counseling your plan covers. Some insurers will cover a set amount of sessions while others reduce costs of medication, or allow you to seek care from a therapist indefinitely. However, because healthcare is a constantly changing field, it is best to reach out to your provider directly to understand what your individual plan will cover.

Additionally, some employers may offer counseling services through an [EAP \(Employee Assistance Program\)](#). This program is offered to give employees resources for personal and work-related issues, ranging from free assessments to counseling and referrals. Be sure to reach out to your HR department to discover exactly what kind of offerings are

available to you. If you aren't covered by a healthcare provider or an employer, doing a quick online search for free or affordable counseling options can turn up some great results in your area.

Though therapy is sometimes seen as a luxury, checking up on your mental health is just as important as your yearly physicals. You can view the money you may be spending now on counseling or therapy as an investment into your own success and happiness in the future.

### Conclusion

Nearly all of us have experienced the negative effects of this global crisis, be it a lost job, a spike in your financially-related anxiety, or an overall decline in your mental well-being. Though self-care may be framed as a luxury, it is actually one of the most important ways to keep yourself productive and can still be done on a tight budget. Though bills and financial obligations should always be a priority, it is important to keep your mental health a priority alongside them. Managing your financial and mental wellness, especially during chaotic times like these, is vital to maintaining productivity and focus in your everyday life.

*The content provided here and throughout the site is for information only, on the topic of financial wellness. Due to the volatility of the Coronavirus and the COVID-19 pandemic, details about the illness, public response, policy, and more, are subject to change. Please consult your state and local offices for the most accurate and up-to-date information about COVID-19 in your area; for global updates, consult the [World Health Organization](#).*

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1. Source: "2020 Consumer Financial Literacy Survey." The Harris Poll. [https://www.nfcc.org/wp-content/themes/foundation/assets/files/NFCC\\_Discover\\_2020\\_FLS\\_Datasheet%20With%20Key%20Findings\\_Clean.pdf](https://www.nfcc.org/wp-content/themes/foundation/assets/files/NFCC_Discover_2020_FLS_Datasheet%20With%20Key%20Findings_Clean.pdf) (accessed June 5, 2020).
2. Source: Singh, Julie. "How Being Outdoors and Getting Active Impacts Stress Management." The American Institute of Stress. <https://www.stress.org/how-being-outdoors-and-getting-active-impacts-stress-management> (accessed June 5, 2020).

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