

A monthly newsletter published by Interface EAP

## Coping with Financial Stress

**F**inancial problems can be enormously stressful. If you are under financial stress, you may be arguing with your spouse or family members about money, experiencing headaches or panic attacks, hiding bills or receipts from family members, or finding it difficult to sleep at night. Your eating habits may have become less healthy, and you may find it hard to make it through the day. Financial stress can also hurt your ability to do your job well.

This means that if you do not manage your financial issues, you may find yourself at risk of losing your job or getting passed over for promotions. You may feel like you are the only one in your situation, or you may have tremendous guilt or regret over choices you have made in the past. Those feelings will not help you create a better future, though. It will help, however, to realize that literally millions of Americans experience financial stress. You are not alone.

- 73% of Americans surveyed by the American Psychological Association said that money is the number one stress in their lives.
- The National Institutes of Health reports chronic stress (worries over several months or longer) can shorten your life by 15 to 20 years.
- According to research by Thomas Garman, about one-third of workers report high stress, and say that personal finance issues are the top stress factor.

Utilize the following strategies to reduce financial stress and get your life back on track:

**Start Coping:** The first step in dealing with financial stress is to relieve some of the stress as quickly as you can. Take that first step! This can help you feel better, and give you the strength and perspective you need to make changes for your future.



**See Your Doctor:** If you are experiencing physical symptoms such as panic attacks, insomnia, depression, or high blood pressure, see a doctor. It can be very difficult to handle financial pressures when you are not feeling well physically or not getting enough sleep. Medical help may give you the edge you need to be able to cope with your problems.

**Exercise:** Regular exercise can help reduce stress. For example, studies find that exercise has a significant impact on anxiety. The American Psychological Association found that regular exercise releases chemicals that help the brain cope better with stress, reduce anxiety, and lift depression. Try to find something you enjoy so that you will stick with it; whether walking with a friend, swimming, or even dancing.

**Get Help:** If your financial distress is compounded by abusive or self-destructive behavior - either in yourself or in loved ones - get help. Those who are abusing alcohol or drugs can find resources through local support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. Family members can get help through Al-Anon. Visit [al-anon.org](http://al-anon.org) or call 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666) for more information.

**Talk About It:** Find someone you can trust – a close friend or relative, clergy or a mental health professional – to share the fears and worries you are experiencing. Most people are afraid to talk about money. Getting it out in the open with someone who can help you see your situation more objectively can be of tremendous help.

**Get Real:** You may not have a clear picture of where you stand financially. Completing a detailed budget is crucial if you want to change the situation you are in now. Include your spouse or partner in the process. This may seem frightening but do not put it off. The longer you wait, the worse your situation will likely become.

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Interface EAP

Total Life Assistance™



# Having Trouble Sleeping?



Sleep is a basic necessity of life and very important to our health and well-being. Research reveals that sleep is a dynamic activity, during which many processes vital to health and well-being take place. Evidence shows that sleep is essential to helping maintain mood, memory, and cognitive performance. It also plays a pivotal role in the normal function of the endocrine and immune systems. In fact, studies show a growing link between sleep duration and a variety of serious health problems, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and depression. According to the national Sleep Foundation:

- 74% of American adults experience a sleep problem a few nights a week or more
- Over 80% of American adults believe that not getting enough sleep leads to poor performance at work, difficulty getting along with others, risk for injury, and poor health.

## Improve Your Sleep!

A good night's rest benefits your health, mood, productivity, and well-being. Try some of these healthy sleep tips to get a better night's sleep:

### **Maintain the same sleep schedule**

Keep your bed time and wake-up time consistent, including on weekends! Your body is regulated by a circadian clock, which controls your sleep patterns. A consistent sleep schedule will strengthen this function.

### **Create a regular bedtime routine**

Read a book, soak yourself in a hot bath, or listen to relaxing music. Separate activities that are relaxing from activities that may cause stress or anxiety.

### **Create the perfect bedroom atmosphere**

Dark, quiet and comfortable spaces are optimal conditions for quality sleep. If noise or light are unavoidable, consider ear plugs, white noise machines, or an eye pillow.

### **Comfort is the key**

Select a mattress and pillow that will support your neck and back. Consider temperature as well by using seasonally appropriate linens that provide enough warmth and comfort throughout the night.

### **Remember the bed's primary purpose**

Your bed should only be used for sleep and sex. This strengthens the idea that the bed is intended for rest & rejuvenation. Try to avoid activities such as watching television or eating a snack in bed.

### **Avoid caffeine & alcohol, and time other beverages**

Caffeine stays in the body 3-5 hours, so it is best avoided 6-8 hours before bedtime. Although alcohol is a sedative and may help you get to sleep sooner, it will increase the number of times you awaken towards the later half of the night. And, if you find yourself waking up to use the toilet during the night, try limiting your liquid intake for a few hours before bedtime.

### **Exercise regularly**

It is ideal to get exercise 3-4 hours before bedtime. A brisk jog or walk in the late afternoon will help you fall asleep faster and sounder at bedtime.



## Coping with Financial Stress *continued*

**Deal with Debt Collectors:** Debt collectors can be aggressive. If you are receiving calls, you need to work out a repayment plan or, if that is impossible, ask them to stop contacting you. You have the right under the federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act to write to a debt collector to instruct them to stop contacting you.

**Note:** this law does not apply to creditors who are contacting you about the debts you owe them. There may be additional state laws that apply in that situation. Once they receive your letter, they are allowed to contact you only to tell you about legal action they will be taking to collect the debt. You can also stop a debt collector from calling you at work by telling them that your employer does not allow such calls.

A good way to stop creditor harassment is to work with a reputable counseling agency. Once you enroll in a counseling program and successfully make your monthly payments, participating creditors will stop contacting you. You also gain peace of mind by knowing you have a plan for actually getting out of debt!

**Be Thankful:** When you are in financial difficulty, you may feel the weight of the world is on your shoulders. But for most people, even when things are not going well, there is still a lot they can be thankful for. Consider keeping a “gratitude journal”. Take a little time each day to write down three or four things you are thankful for, and really take a few moments to appreciate them.

**Simplify:** In today’s frantic consumer world, it can be hard to step back and simplify. A simpler life may save you money and help reduce your stress (and improve your overall health). Look at where you are spending your time and money to see if you can identify ways to cut back.

**Change What You Can:** Lynne Hornyak, PhD, PCC recommends you look at things that are causing you financial stress in two ways; their level of importance, and whether they can be changed:

**Important, Changeable:** A high mortgage payment may be an example of this. You need a roof over your head so it is important, but you can change this expense by perhaps refinancing or moving to a less expensive home. Frequently bailing your friends or children out of their money problems, when you have your own, is something that also may be important and changeable.

**Important, Not Changeable:** Perhaps your financial problems were due to expensive medical bills or a divorce. There may be nothing you can do to change the facts, but those issues are important. Since you cannot change what happened, you may have to change your attitude, expectations or both. Grieve for your loss, but then shift your focus onto other things you can do to live within your current financial reality.

**Not Important, Changeable:** If your spouse insists on paying the bills by hand when you would rather do it online, that may bug you, but as long as they are being paid it may not be important. If it’s not, try changing your attitude.

**Not Important, Not Changeable:** Maybe your parents always squabbled about money and that bothered you. But that is in the past and how they talked to you then is not really important, nor can you change it. Let it go. Of course, if you are a parent now, how you talk to your kids about money is entirely within your control!

**Become Resilient:** Resilience is adapting well in the face of difficult events or stress. You may have more resilience than you think, and it can be learned. According to the American Psychological Association, there are several ways to increase resilience including making connections with others, avoiding seeing problems as insurmountable (shifting your perception), accepting that change is a part of life (attitude), and moving toward your goals and taking decisive action (taking control of and responsibility for your life).

For more information and to access confidential counseling and support services contact your Employee Assistance Program. You can do it, we can help!

Stress

Financial

Legal

Depression

For free and confidential assistance, call your Employee Assistance Program and speak with a Care Coordinator:

(713) 781-3364

(800) 324-4327

Se Habla Español

(800) 324-2490

Marital Problems

Family Problems

Alcohol/Drug Problems

Other Referrals

[www.4eap.com](http://www.4eap.com)

Your employer has contracted with Interface EAP to provide you an Employee Assistance Program.