

Financial resilience during the pandemic

With stock market volatility and worrying headlines about how long the pandemic will last, it's hard not to feel uneasy and question what the future holds. Consider these tips and resources to help you work through financial decisions and challenges that you may face in the weeks ahead.

Create a budget

Make a list of your regular monthly expenses, like rent, loan payments, utilities, food, etc. Compare that with your household's take-home pay. If you are bringing home more money than your expenses, consider putting a bit of the extra to the side as a financial cushion. If your budget is more than you bring home each month, look for places you can cut to make ends meet. For help, visit www.consumer.gov.

Control your spending

Being isolated and bored at home can give you a lot of time to shop online. With so much uncertainty, it's important to resist the urge to buy impulse items. Prioritize your most important financial obligations such as food, shelter and transportation first, and items like household décor and extra clothing last. If necessary, consider pausing automatic bill payments so you can control the payment timing until you are on better financial footing.

Contact your lenders (mortgage, car, rent, utilities, student loans, etc.)

If you are unable to work due to COVID-19 – you've fallen ill, your place of employment has temporarily closed, you have to stay home and take care of children or loved ones who are ill, etc. – you may not be able to pay your bills. Many lenders have set up exceptions, special accommodations and relief funds to support the public during this health crisis. Take advantage of them.

Reach out to your credit card company

Even if your credit card issuer has not formally released a statement of support, if you are at risk of missing a payment, it is worthwhile to contact the company to discuss your options. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) advises on its [website \(www.fdic.gov\)](http://www.fdic.gov) that during a disaster, "Your creditors will likely work with you on a solution, but it's important to contact them as soon as possible and explain your situation." Late payments can hurt your credit score, and pile on extra charges and fees, so getting ahead of the issue will save you down the road.

Be aware of financial scams

If you receive a phone call, text message or email asking for your financial information in exchange for COVID-19 testing or medication, do not provide it. Unfortunately, fraudulent companies are taking advantage of people worried about COVID-19 and trying to steal their money and/or sensitive information by offering unproven cures. In particular, note that the [World Health Organization \(www.who.int\)](http://www.who.int) is warning about people posing as their representatives to get sensitive information and solicit donations through emails, phone calls, text messages and even fax messages.

Discuss finances with your partner or someone you trust

Concerns over money is at or near the top of the list of things that stress most of us out. It's important to communicate with your partner and family about finances on a regular basis to understand your situation and agree on financial priorities. If necessary, consult with a financial professional.

Access community resources

- State and local human service agencies can connect you with public assistance programs such as food stamps or emergency financial funds, Medicaid, housing and the like. Learn more at hhs.gov/programs/social-services/index.html.
- The United Way has information on food banks, clothing closets, shelters, rent and utility assistance, support for older Americans and persons with disabilities, etc. Visit www.unitedway.org.
- Aunt Bertha is a social care network where you can search for services like medical care, food, job training, transportation and more, right in your area. Visit www.auntbertha.com.
- The U.S. Government offers benefit information for individuals younger than age 55. Visit www.benefits.gov.

Your program is completely confidential and here to help you and your household members 24/7/365. No situation is too big or too small. Give us a call or visit your program website to get started.

Source: Kostaras, S., & Trent. (2020, March 18). Where to Find Financial Support During Coronavirus COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.thesimpledollar.com/financial-wellness/coronavirus-financial-assistance/> on March 19, 2020.