Getting a handle on your financial health during and after COVID-19

Life & Work Connections
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When I think of uncomfortable topics, finances easily jump to the top of the list — and I live with a loan officer. But just as it is important to stop and breathe through a fight-or-flight response during a challenging conversation, so it is with difficult financial news.

Over the past few months, many aspects of our lives have shifted from seeming stability to multiple levels of uncertainty. The uncertainties brought by COVID-19 have now affected most of us financially, through furloughs, pay reductions or increased expenses related to working from home.

If you, your family or your friends are facing financial hardship due to this pandemic, know that community resources are available.

As with any other aspect of health, financial wellness is complicated, and there isn’t one golden answer. However, here are some tried-and-true methods that can help ease financial stress.

**Take baby steps**

As the adage goes, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." Along the same lines, you’ve probably heard that "a penny saved is a penny earned." Like physical health, financial health is a cause and effect process, and even small efforts can reap big dividends.

Richard P. Rosen, interim director of the Take Charge America Institute for Consumer Financial Education and Research, shared some simple tips in the "Taking Care of Yourself and Others? Building Wellness and Resiliency" staff webinar on May 8.

First, he suggests tracking your monthly spending, and then creating and following a budget. "Write down every single expense you’ve made during two weeks. I mean everything," Rosen said. "And then, at the end, dissect what is discretionary and what is nondiscretionary."

If you haven’t already, set up a rainy day fund to use in emergencies. Rosen says it is critical that every single person has between three and six months of expenses in a saving account.

And, even if you are further away from retirement, contribute to those accounts and let them grow. Although the stock market has been turbulent due to the pandemic, it is "hugely resilient," Rosen said.

**Take advantage of available resources**

As a University employee, you also have the opportunity to meet with a Fidelity Investments...
or TIAA representative for an individual financial consultation [5] at no cost. Reach out, and a certified financial planner can help you plan for future needs and determine if you’re on track to meet your financial goals.

You can also review on-demand financial literacy videos [6] on topics such as creating a budget, ditching debt or collecting Social Security benefits at your own convenience. TIAA also offers a series of short videos [7] addressing financial concerns related to COVID-19.

One day the pandemic will end, and we will all see a little more certainty when it comes to our finances. Until then, invest in your financial wellness by having those uncomfortable conversations, taking those baby steps, and using the resources available to you.

Chad Myler is the health promotion manager at Life & Work Connections, where he oversees programs that impact the population health of University employees. He holds a master's degree in health promotion from the University of Utah and is a certified health education specialist. He leads a 15-minute Zoom Q&A [8] with a financial consultant every Friday at 2 p.m.

To stay up to date with opportunities to improve your wellness, subscribe to the Life & Work Connections email list [9].

A version of this article [10] originally appeared on the Life & Work Connections website.

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/getting-handle-your-financial-health-during-and-after-covid-19

Links
[1] https://lifework.arizona.edu/tools/community-financial-resources
[2] https://cals.arizona.edu/fcs/faculty/rick_rosen
[4] https://hr.arizona.edu/employees-affiliates/benefits/retirement-plans
[5] https://hr.arizona.edu/employees-affiliates/benefits/financial-education-consulting-resources
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[8] https://lifework.arizona.edu/training-and-workshops/15-for-you
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