

Turn over a new financial leaf in 2015

If you make New Years' resolutions, you're among the roughly 45 percent of U.S. adults who do. While resolutions run the gamut from losing weight to becoming a better person, polls show that every year, one of the most popular resolutions is to improve personal finances.

It's not a great surprise that doing better with money is on many people's minds after an expensive holiday season. It's a good time to get one's financial house in order, particularly if credit card debt piled up.

Some people have short-term goals like saving for a special vacation or a new car; others have long-term goals like putting money aside for college, home buying or retirement. Still others want to pay off debt or build an emergency fund.

Managing finances starts with taking stock of your current spending and building a plan and a budget. Here are some tips to help you be successful:

Assess your current status. Review monthly income, expenses, discretionary spending and savings.

Review spending patterns. Keep a detailed log of all expenditures for one month to see just where your money actually goes – it's often surprising.

Find ways to cut corners. Bring your lunch to work; ride a bike or carpool to work; buy down on cable or phone packages; use coupons; reduce spending on nonessential groceries or clothing items.



List all credit cards and their interest rates. Work to pay off the card with the highest interest and pay more than the monthly minimum on the others. Try to negotiate interest rates down with lenders.

Check credit reports annually. You're entitled to free reports from the three national credit reporting firms each year. Get them from the only authorized site for free reports, annualcreditreport.com.

Build savings. Direct all or the larger portion of your next raise into savings. Set aside money every month for an emergency fund, even if it's only a few dollars at a time.

Make the most of your employee benefits. Take advantage of matching funds in your 401k; check your benefit package for any free or discounted services that may be available.

Use your EAP personal finance services, including debt and financial counseling, retirement and college savings plans and valuable discounts. Log on to the Member site for calculators, budget worksheets and many more financial planning tools and resources. Or call us 24/7 for personalized help.