



FINANCIAL WELLNESS DURING EMERGENCIES



There is a lot of uncertainty and often fear during emergencies, and financial stress is very common. Being proactive and making a plan can help reduce stress and anxiety.

Here are some helpful tips:

Consider cost-cutting strategies.

This is the right time to use all of your resources available to you and use all the things you have on hand. Take advantage of the entertainment options you have at home. Go through the cupboards and make as many meals as possible with the items you have. Wear all the clothes you have in the back of your closet. Conduct an inventory of your service providers. Do you still use all the services you pay for? If not, cancel them! Now might be the right time to re-consider or postpone any larger purchases.

Beware of scammers.

Unfortunately there are individuals who will prey on people's fears and the collective panic. Avoid becoming the victim of unethical activities by ignoring irrational claims about items like emergency equipment (that the average person doesn't need), or "coronavirus kits," that contain the same materials as a typical first aid kit but are twice the price.

Be watchful of suspicious emails, text messages, and phone calls from unfamiliar sources. Some fraudsters will use this period of uncertainty to deliver malware and/or trick you into sharing your personal and financial information. They may act like they are the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or World Health Organization (WHO) but they are not!

Don't overreact.

You may have seen this happening, people rushing to clear the shelves of things like toilet paper, cleaning supplies, and canned goods. Try not to do the same. Make a list and buy only what you need.

Additionally, if you see an "opportunity" to buy things online at inflated prices, protect your bank account, steel yourself against overreacting, and avoid making those purchases.

Report price-gouging

Though both state and federal governments have issued executive orders to prevent and prohibit price gouging, consumers are encouraged to report this behavior. You should notify agencies like Amazon and eBay if sellers on their platforms are offering products at unreasonably high prices. Minnesotans can report instances of price gouging by calling 651-296-3353 or 800-657-3787. Complaints can be made online at www.ag.state.mn.us/office/complaint.asp.

Low on cash? Still take it easy on credit.

If you don't have enough emergency cash to cover expenses, use your credit cards for essential purchases. Just remember to make the minimum payment each month.



Call your issuers and services.

Don't avoid your bills. If you are struggling to make payments or need some short-term relief, call your credit card issuer and loan servicers to ask for help. Many companies are willing to work with individuals during crisis to create an alternative payment plan, or even discuss interest rates.

Beware of investments

When the market is changing quickly, salespeople may use scare tactics to "lure" people into "safer" investments. Contact your personal financial advisor, or the [state securities office](#) if you have questions about investments. Feel free to contact your retirement advisors:

Additional Support

Filing taxes

The IRS has developed a special page on its website to support Americans affected by the COVID -19 virus. [Visit the page here](#) to see updates as new information is available.

It was recently announced that the tax deadline for filing and payments has been extended to July 15, 2020.

Student Loans

Although the President announced a freeze on interest rates for student loans, the freeze only applies to federal student loans. As you consider how to approach your private loans, consider all of the options. A deferment may not be your best option, it may be an income-driven repayment program! Talk to your lender directly.

Food and Essentials

If you are unable to purchase food and basic essential needs for your household, you may be eligible for the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#). If you don't qualify for SNAP, there are still resources available for help. Locate a local food bank or pantry by visiting [Feeding America](#) or [FoodPantries.org](#)