

**Family Living
Focus**
by
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Extension



Digging Out Of Debt

If you are feeling like you are being buried in bills, you are not alone.

Savings rates in the United States are well below historical averages while personal bankruptcy filings have doubled those of 10 years ago. A little more than a decade ago, Americans saved 8.8 percent of their after-tax income; today the personal savings rate is less than half that amount.

In addition to the lack of savings, the average U.S. household has credit cards with balances totaling more than \$4,800. Debt as a share of after-tax income has been rising, with Americans devoting an average of almost 11 percent of their income to servicing consumer debt in the form of credit cards and automobile loans. The percentage of homeowners who are falling behind on their mortgage payments is growing, and delinquency rates as high as 5.6 percent have been reported on automobile loans.

Potential debt problems can be spotted before they reach the serious stage. By knowing what danger signals to look for, you can take steps to prevent a problem before it occurs. If any of the following signals look familiar, you may be headed for financial trouble.

- You think of credit as cash, not debt.
- Your debts are greater than your assets.
- You owe more than seven creditors.
- You are an impulsive or compulsive shopper.
- You and your spouse are dishonest with each other about your use of credit.
- You don't know how much your monthly living expenses are or the amount of your total debt.
- Your expected increase in income is already committed to paying off debts.
- You depend on extra income, such as earnings by a second person or over-time by the breadwinner to help you make ends meet.
- You have less than 2 months' take-home pay in cash or

savings where you can get to it quickly.

- You have to pay back several installment payments that will take over 12 months to pay off.
- You have more than 20 percent of your take-home pay committed to credit payments other than your home mortgage.
- You get behind in utility or rent payments.
- You have to consolidate several loans into one or reduce monthly payments by extending current loans in order to pay your debts.
- You cannot afford to pay for regular living expenses or credit payments; therefore, you take out a loan, withdraw savings, skip payments, or pay only the minimum amount due on your charge accounts.

If you said yes to at least four of the above statements, examine your budget and look for ways to tighten your belt. If you checked five or more, you are probably headed for financial trouble. If you checked seven or more, then you are in financial danger.

If you are having serious financial trouble, you are probably having difficulty staying ahead of your bills. You can only cut expenses so much, so one often has no choice but to delay payment on certain debts. One of the most important choices you will have to make is which bills to pay first, which to pay later and which to refuse to pay. Often consumers pay items like credit card bills which do not urgently have to be paid, but their collectors often make the most 'noise.'

If you are having trouble paying all of your bills, you should instead be paying those creditors who can "hurt" you the most, such as those who can take your home or car. Generally speaking, you should direct your limited resources to what is most necessary for your family — usually food, essential medical expenses, shelter and utility service. If you need your car to get to work, this payment should also be considered essential.

School's Benefit Auction Is April 25-26

MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.) — Manheim Christian Day School's benefit sale is taking on a whole new look compared to the first one conducted 27 years ago.

Lawn, garden, art items and much more are interspersed among traditional quilts and household articles.

Bidding offers such unique services as a complete orthodontic treatment valued at \$4,385, a golf outing, and a white water raft trip.

It's now a two-day event, beginning Friday, April 25, with a sale preview, baked goods, crafts, chicken barbecue, plant, and flowers sold. A silent auction on class projects will begin a 3 p.m. and run through Saturday at 11:30 a.m. General merchandise and selected gift certificates will be auctioned beginning at 6 p.m.

Saturday begins with a country breakfast served between 7 a.m. - 10 p.m.

At 9 a.m., the action of lawn and garden items, gift certificates, and general merchandise will begin.

At 11:45 a.m., the art auction



Students Anthony Young and Allison Balmer check out some items that will go to the highest bidder at Manheim Christian Day School's 27th annual benefit auction, April 25-26. Shown are a rustic water trough, a child's riding tractor, a Weber gas grill, lawn furniture, cast iron dog, and other garden accents.

is scheduled with works by many well-known artists offered.

At 12:30 p.m., special features will be auctioned with the quilt auction beginning 1 p.m.

At 3 p.m., furniture will be

auctioned.

Look for the big tents set up at the school located along Route 72, one mile north of Manheim. For more information, call the school at (717) 665-4300.

No-Nonsense Solutions To Growing Obesity Problems

PHILADELPHIA — A new research review identifies several causes to the growing epidemic of childhood obesity, including lack of physical activity, large portion sizes, and increased intake of sugar-sweetened soft drinks. The authors propose a "common sense approach" to the prevention and treatment of childhood obesity that focuses on both the home and school environments. These steps include setting aside time for healthy meals and physical activity, eliminating unhealthy foods — such as soft drinks and candy — from school vending machines and possible taxes on fast food and soft drinks, to name a few. In addition, the authors suggest that soft

drinks might be a possible culprit because of their ability to raise blood sugar, whereas milk, which has a low ability to raise blood sugar, may help protect young adults from becoming obese.

National Dairy Council® provides some no nonsense tips to help your child get adequate nutrition with foods they love:

• Yogurt Parfaits — Make breakfast time fun, quick, and easy for the kids. Let them add fresh fruit (such as blueberries, strawberries, or cut melon slices) to any flavored yogurt. Offer extra ingredients for texture such as raisins, granola, or their favorite cereal.

• Plan Your Menu — If your child(ren) dine in the school cafeteria, ask them to bring home the school lunch menu so that you can decide together what foods he or she will be choosing. You can't monitor them to make sure they eat all the vegetables, but

you can help them to make their selections ahead of time.

• Set an Example — The most important thing parents can do to encourage their children to eat healthy is to show them! Provide healthy meal options at home — such as pastas with vegetables; lean meats and Parmesan cheese; milk with meals and lowfat yogurts and fruit for dessert. They are more likely to choose these foods if they see you doing so.

• Avoid Nutrient-Void Foods in Vending Machines — Encourage your child to grab a single-serve of milk or a serving of yogurt in the school lunch line, instead of candy and soda from a machine. Also, talk to your child's school administration about their school's regulations on the availability of sodas and candy during school lunchtime.

• Take a Field Trip to the Grocery Store — Get your kids involved in selecting healthful food choices.

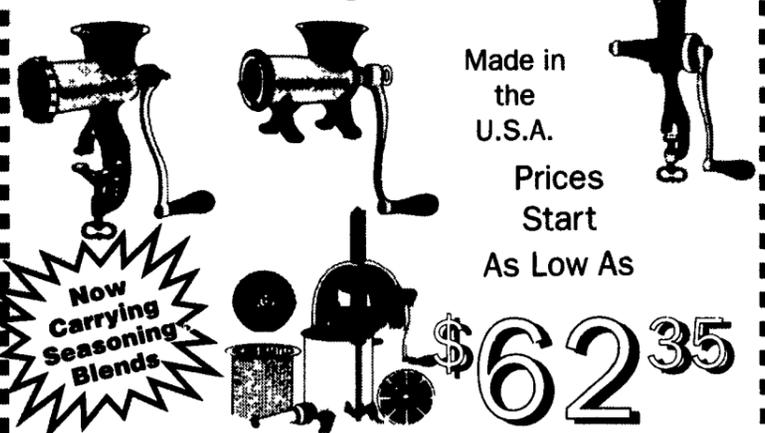
There is excellent free information available on dealing with debt.

Check with your local library or Cooperative Extension office for more information. But remember, the best thing you can do as a consumer is to realize a worsening situation and try to reduce spending and debt before you get too deep in debt.

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