

25 *FAST* FINANCIAL FIXES



Review your credit card statement. Sit down with your **credit card** bill and conduct an audit of your expenditures, including ones made impulsively. Use this exercise to learn from your past emotional spending mistakes—and avoid them in the future.



Look at your tax refund. Do you receive a **big tax refund** check from Uncle Sam each year? “You may want to speak with your tax professional and adjust your withholdings,” writes Brad Wright, a certified financial planner at New England Financial Planning Group in Burlington, Mass. Think of your refund as an interest-free loan to Uncle Sam, Wright says.

Bundle your insurance. Having one company cover your disparate insurance needs can be a money-smart move. “You may be entitled to a better rate if you bundle your homeowner’s, auto, and umbrella insurance policies under one company,” Wright writes.

Phone your cable company. Dial up your cable provider at least once per year to **renegotiate your cable package**. You may be able to get your bill reduced.

Go digital. Sign up for a digital money-management system, such as Quicken or Mint.com, to track your spending—and potentially reduce making impulse purchases and overdrawing your account.



Request a free credit report. Request your **free annual credit report** from each of the three credit-reporting bureaus at annualcreditreport.com. “Make sure you are aware of all the credit in your name and (that) you don’t have any unexpected outstanding debt,” writes Bethany Griffith, a certified financial planner in Columbia, S.C. “Reviewing your credit report is also a way to catch if you have been a victim of identity theft,” Griffith adds.



Unsubscribe. “You’ll be much less tempted to overspend on your clothing/tech/fun budget if you aren’t bombarded with daily emails about all the ‘stuff’ you could buy,” Griffith writes.

Raise your insurance deductible. Carve out extra room in your monthly budget by raising your **auto insurance** deductible, thereby lowering your premiums.

Find unclaimed cash. Head to your state’s treasury website or unclaimed.org to locate property in your name. “It takes almost no time to come up with your own money in these various state-run ‘financial lost and founds,’” writes Michael Resnick, senior wealth management advisor and certified financial planner at GCG Financial in Deerfield, Ill.



Inflate your tires. Improve your gas mileage—and save money—by making sure that your tires are properly inflated. Doing this can improve mileage by 0.6% on average, and up to 3% in some instances, according to the **U.S. Department of Energy**.

Automate your savings. Set up an automatic siphon from your paycheck to your retirement account. Automate payments from your checking to your **savings accounts**. You’ll build savings without even noticing it.

Cut the cable. If negotiating down your cable bill isn’t enough, consider cutting it entirely. Replace those channels with subscriptions to streaming services such as **Netflix** or Hulu, which can cost less per month than your typical cable bill.



Start a virtual piggy bank. Sign up for tools such as Acorns or Digit, which funnel spare change into an account to help you reach your savings goals, writes Natalie Colley, analyst at Francis Financial in New York City.

Enroll in a high-yield checking and savings account.

Move your money into a high-yield account, writes Autumn K. Campbell, certified financial planner at The Planning Center in Tulsa, Okla.

Online-only banks may offer more competitive yields on checking and savings accounts than their brick-and-mortar counterparts.

Take advantage of employer benefits. If you're not cashing in on an employer match by investing in the company-sponsored retirement account, consider remedying that. Contact your human resources department or consult your employee handbook for more information on securing the match. Overlooking that perk is like turning your nose up at free money.



Check your Wi-Fi and cable bills.

"Some companies will charge you a 'Router/Modem Fee,' which could be around \$8 a month," writes Alex Rupert, senior associate for private client services at Sequoia Financial Group in Akron, Ohio. "Research

the company's website to determine which routers or modems are approved and then buy your own. I bought a used one off Amazon for \$5."

Boost your retirement savings. Log into your retirement account and increase the percentage you allocate to it by 1 or 2 percent. It will bring you that much closer to your retirement goals, and you won't feel a difference in your paycheck.

Determine whether you qualify for free tax filing.

If you made less than \$66,000 in adjusted gross income in 2018, you qualify to **file taxes for free** through the IRS-partnered **Free File Alliance**. Bookmark this website today and use it come tax time instead of utilizing the so-called free services offered independently by tax software providers, which often include add-ons and upcharges.



Request a credit-limit increase. Log into your credit card account and request a limit increase. "Even if you don't need it, a higher limit will bolster your percent of **credit utilization** and lead to an increase in your credit score," writes Amy Hubble, a certified financial planner in Oklahoma City.



Automate your credit card payments.

Open your credit card account and put your payments on autopilot. It's always best to repay the entire balance each month if you can afford to, so you won't pay interest.

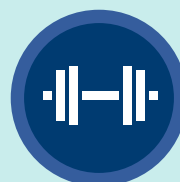
Fast-track your debt payoff goals. Go into your student loan, mortgage or credit card account and add a few dollars or more to your automatic repayment amount. "You will be surprised how quickly these extra payments will help **reduce your debt** and the interest you are paying on it," writes Jamie Ebersole, a certified financial planner in Wellesley Hills, Mass.

Ramp up contributions to your health savings account.

Boost savings for medical expenses by increasing contributions to your health savings account, or HSA. "Contributions to your HSA are tax-deductible and, once the accounts get above a certain threshold, can be invested in mutual funds for long-term growth," writes Judy McNary, a certified financial planner in Boulder, Colo.



Drop the home phone. Who uses a home phone these days anyway? Drop your home phone to lower your phone bill and stick with your cellphone.



Rethink the gym. Do you refuse to cancel that overpriced **gym membership** you never use? Consider ways to get in shape, such as running, walking or following online videos, without paying that hefty price each month.

Identify a financial goal. Whether it's funding your next vacation or paying off your student loans, pinpoint a money goal that motivates you to save and cut down on spending.

