

MANAGING YOUR MONEY



Now Is The Time To Get In Financial Shape

(NAPS)—We've all heard it before: no pain, no gain. This adage is as true of your financial health as it is of getting in shape physically. There are, however, financial "exercises" that can help you reach your goal of financial health with minimal pain.

As with any exercise program, it helps to have a few guiding principles in place:

- *Review your finances regularly.* Luckily, it doesn't have to be as much as the three-times-per-week recommendation for physical exercise, but you should make a monthly commitment.

- *Deal with the problem areas first.* If you are in debt, take control of it right away. The money you save in ongoing interest adds up significantly over time.

- *Protect your credit rating.* Ensure that you always pay your bills on time (plus, you save the money you would otherwise spend on late charges).

- *Set yourself a goal.* Not only is it motivational but it is also satisfying and rewarding when you reach that goal—you deserve it.

To start your new financial fitness regimen, start by visiting one of the major Internet finance portals, such as Yahoo! Finance. They not only provide extensive educational resources, but also secure, easy-to-use tools that greatly simplify personal finance management. If you are a beginner at finances, these sites can help you quickly grasp the basics. They also have more sophisticated tools as your knowledge and confidence expand.

Get started now! Here are three online exercises that will help you build a solid foundation to your financial wellness program:

Bill Payment Basic Routine—A regular bill payment routine is a great way to kick off your journey to financial health. An online bill payment service like Yahoo! Bill Pay lets you automate recurring payments and schedule reminders so that you never miss a payment again. You can also see all of your upcoming payments



Online "exercises" can help many consumers achieve financial wellness.

and projected balances from a single screen, which further simplifies record-keeping. Plus, no more writing checks or licking stamps; you'll soon have a slimmer, trimmer bill-paying system.

The 401(k) Long Distance Run—For retirement planning, it's best to start early, maintain a steady pace and always keep the finish line in mind. An online account access program lets you keep tabs on your 401(k) balance between quarterly statements anytime, anywhere, and allows you to evaluate how current market activity is affecting your portfolio.

Smart Budget Stretches—A well-designed budget lets you get the most out of each month's paycheck. Start by observing your spending patterns; a service like Yahoo! Expense Manager helps by categorizing and tracking your expenses over time. Building a budget based on your actual spending patterns will make it much easier to live by your budget guidelines. At the end of each month, check back over your income and expenses to see how closely they map to your budget goals.

Following is a list of sites that can help you get started with your financial fitness routine:

Yahoo! Finance Money Manager: <http://moneymanager.yahoo.com>.

iPlace: <http://www.iplace.com>.

LendingTree: <http://www.lendingtree.com>.