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# It's Still a Good Time to Become Financially Fit

Consumer Column Budgeting

New Year, New Me, right? We're a few weeks into the new year and you may have dropped your New Year's Resolution to become financially fit. Don't despair. It's still early in the new year and a great time to clean up your financials, adopt better spending habits, and start saving more. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

## **Make a budget and stick with it**

This almost cliché financial advice is repeated so often for one important reason: it works. Start by tracking your spending, once you've tracked how much money you spend over the course of a few weeks, you can look for trends in what you're spending. These trends help you start planning on how much income goes towards necessities (like rent/mortgage, utilities, groceries), and see areas where you can cut back (rarely-used subscription services, eating out less) and start putting away a portion of your income towards a savings goal. The most important part of a budget is sticking with it, once you start tracking your spending you should make sure to take time every day or every few days to log your spending and compare that to your planned spending.

## **Deal with any debt**

Debt is an extremely stressful thing to deal with but the new year is a time to get a handle on any debt that may have piled up around the holidays. Debt should be something factored into your budget like

your electric bill and tracked. Although it may be daunting, contact your creditors to discuss your situation, they may be willing to work with you to put together a repayment plan. If you're carrying debt on multiple credit cards, talk to your local bank about the possibility of consolidating that debt into a single payment so you can close the extra card accounts. No matter what you do, addressing debt instead of ignoring it will help you get a handle on it and make positive progress.

### **Shop around**

Many times people will stick with whatever they find first, be it their internet provider, car insurance, or brand of soup, but that may not be the best deal, especially a few years down the line. There's nothing wrong with being loyal to a company but just because they've been your cable provider for a few years isn't necessarily a good reason to stay with them and doesn't ensure that you are getting the best value for what you are paying. Look around to see what other companies are charging for similar services, you may find that your current company is priced competitively or you may find that you can get a better deal elsewhere. One thing to beware of is a cheaper product or service that is cheaper for a reason, make sure you are still getting a similar quality or ask yourself if you are ok with a downgrade.

Making a commitment to financial health and wellness can be a great way to start the New Year on good footing that can last throughout the year and your life.