

Money makeover

If you're focusing on your health and fitness this summer, why not get your financial wellbeing in shape, too?

Money worries can be a significant contributor to stress for many people each year, and this can have a negative impact on your health. Getting control of your finances is time well spent, so *Zee Magazine* asked the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service with the power to sort out financial problems – for some handy tips to get your finances looking healthy over the coming months.

Six steps to a stress-free summer

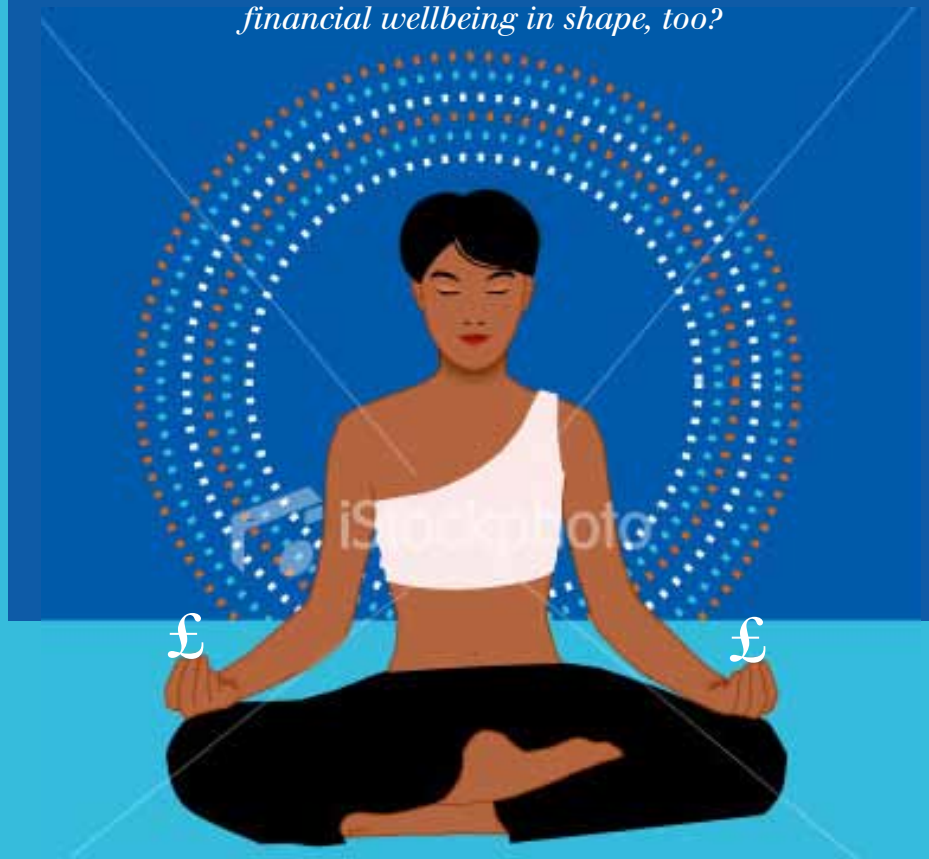
1. Firstly, make sure you are fully aware of your financial situation. Sit down and work out exactly what you have coming in and going out each month.
2. Check your account for regular payments that you no longer need or use – like standing orders or direct debits – and cancel them with the business and your bank.
3. Set yourself a realistic budget. If you're planning a new purchase, set aside a small amount each month to help spread the cost.
4. Shop around if you have an insurance policy that needs renewing, or you want a better rate of interest on an account. There may be a better deal available, but check for limitations.
5. Check your statements regularly – make sure you recognise every transaction – and if you don't, let your bank know straight away.
6. Try to ensure that there's always a little spare cash to act as a financial cushion, just in case things go wrong.

Got a problem?

Last year, around a million people got in touch with the Financial Ombudsman Service. The ombudsman can look at a wide range of financial problems, from mortgages to motor insurance, and from overseas money transfers to mobile phone cover. So if you have a financial problem that you can't sort out with the business involved, the ombudsman might be able to help.

To contact the ombudsman service call 0300 123 9 123 or visit financial-ombudsman.org.uk

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Health and wealth

Ready to get active? Here are some tips on money matters to help you make the most out of sport and health activities...

Try before you buy: If you're thinking about joining a gym, ask if they have a free trial period before you sign up. Take some time to consider what facilities you'll actually use – and don't feel pressured to signing up on the spot. Bear in mind that if you're paying by direct debit, there may be some rules covering cancelling the contract early.

Feeling committed? If you're feeling fully committed to getting in shape, you may be able to get cheaper rates if you sign up to additional exercise classes or

training plans – but only if you intend to use them! Some insurance policies, like health insurance, also offer free fitness classes or gym memberships when you sign up. However, if you take out health insurance remember to tell them your full medical history, as this can be important if you need to make a claim.

Shop around: Health and fitness equipment can sometimes be pricey. Have a look at suggestions online or in magazines for low-cost ways to exercise at home before you lighten your bank account. If you are considering using credit to make a purchase, make sure it's clear what you'll be paying in total, including the interest.