

The 12 Tips of CHRISTMAS

It's the countdown to Christmas! For many people it's the time of goodwill and festive cheer. But, there is no denying Christmas can also be a stressful time no matter what the season holds, from finding the time for your family and friends to simply making ends meet.

So, to help lighten your load we've teamed up with Santa's little helpers at the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service that helps you sort out money-related problems – to bring you our top tips on avoiding a Christmas cash crisis.

The 12 tips of Christmas, the ombudsman said to me were...



12 PAYMENTS BOUNCING

Remember that bank holidays over the festive period are not working days for banks – so direct debits and standing orders may be taken earlier than you think from your account. You can avoid any late payment charges by making sure you've got enough cash in your account to cover the payments due. It's tricky at this time of year, but try to have some emergency funds in your account too in case you get any unexpected payments due.

11 PIPES BREAKING

We can't guarantee snow but it's definitely going to be a chilly Christmas and New Year. While many people associate flood damage with storms, most of the ombudsman's flood complaints involve frozen or burst piping. Check that your property is in good repair and if you haven't used your heating for a bit, test it for at least a week if you're planning on being away during the winter. If you do find a leak or any damage, let your buildings and contents insurer know straight away.

10 PAYDAY LENDERS

According to recent research, many people will be making it through the festive season on tight finances this year. So it's no surprise that people fall back on credit cards, store cards or payday loans to get them out of a tight spot. If you

take out credit, make sure you know exactly what you're signing up to – even if you're only borrowing for a short period. High interest rates can easily turn a £50 debt into a £100 repayment. Never borrow more than you can afford to pay back and don't get caught out by surprises in the terms and conditions.

9 LADIES DANCING

We all love a Christmas boogie. While you're letting your hair down be wary – the festive season is the prime time for fraudsters to get hold of your PIN or account details. Take care at dodgy cash points or when paying on card at a bar – always be wary of people standing behind you – and shield your PIN from prying eyes.





8 MAIDS A' MOOCHING

Whether you're braving the crowds or doing it online – Christmas is a time for shopping! Looking around for the best discounts will save you some cash. Why not have a plan of attack before you hit the high-street? Check out the online versions of the shops before you leave – and set yourself a limit on the key purchases you're planning on making. Watch out at the till – you may be tempted in to buying insurance or a warranty. Check if you really need them first – you might be covered by a policy you already have, like your home insurance.

7 SAVERS SAVING

Come Boxing Day you may not want to think about Christmas again – well at least not for another 12 months anyway. But it's never too early to start saving for the year ahead. Putting away even £10 a month from January could give you a nice pot to take the sting out of your festive food shop in 2014. If you're taking out a tax-free saving plan like an ISA, don't be fooled by headline-grabbing rates. Ask the provider how long the interest rate lasts – and what it will be if and when it changes.

6 GET REPAYING

If you borrowed money under any special interest-free deals, keep a note of when the deal runs out, as repayments after this date may be expensive. Planning ahead and paying off more than the minimum amount due each month could help you clear the debt much quicker. Most importantly, make sure you don't miss a repayment as this could mean an early end to any special 0% deals.

5 GOLD RINGS!

If you're lucky enough to receive an expensive piece of jewellery or a gadget this Christmas make sure that you've got it covered. Don't assume your contents insurance will protect it should the worst happen as often policies have a 'single item' limit. If you're not sure, ring your insurer to check.

4 CALLING BANKS

If you're having trouble meeting your financial obligations, Christmas can be particularly difficult. But facing a problem head-on can help sort things out. If you realise you won't have enough money to pay your outgoings, contact your bank or lender straight away – it may be able to help. If you find you're struggling to cope and you need assistance ring a free debt counselling service, like Step Change; they may be able to help.

3 FRENCH HOLIDAYS

Whether you plan to spend your festive season whooshing down the slopes or sunning yourself on a beach, don't forget travel insurance. It's often something that is left until the last minute – but good insurance can give you ultimate peace of mind. Check what the policy does – and more importantly, doesn't – cover. For example a policy that doesn't cover winter sports would be no good on your skiing trip! Find one that suits your needs and your plans and remember cheaper doesn't necessarily mean better.

2 TURTLE DOVES

From turtles and doves to cats and dogs – remember that an animal is for life, not just for Christmas. So it makes sense to protect your pet with pet insurance. We often hear from consumers who have attempted to make a claim for treatment, only to find that the insurer won't cover them. If possible, contact your insurer before paying for any treatment – but if it's an emergency, get in touch with them as soon as you can.

AND THE OMBUDSMAN CAN HELP FOR FREE!

Last year, around 3,000 people downloaded the ombudsman's complaint form on Christmas Day. If you can only remember one of these tips it's this – if you get stuck with a financial problem and you don't know where to turn, give the ombudsman a call or find them on Twitter and they'll point you in the right direction.

FINANCIAL OMBUDSMAN

Get in touch with the
ombudsman visit
www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk
or call 0300 123 9 123
or find us on Twitter
[@financialombuds](https://twitter.com/financialombuds).