



12 tips of CHRISTMAS

It's the countdown to Christmas! For many people it's the time of goodwill and festive cheer. But there's no denying Christmas can be a stressful time too. 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.

11 PIPES BREAKING

We can't guarantee snow but it's definitely going to be chilly, so watch out for frozen pipes. If you do find a leak or any damage, let your buildings and contents insurer know straight away.

10 PAYDAY LENDERS

From presents for the kids to the big food shop, Christmas can put a lot of strain on our finances. The promise of some quick and easy cash might seem like the ideal solution. But high interest rates can easily turn a £50 debt into a £100 repayment – so be careful you know exactly what you're signing up for.

9 LADIES DANCING

We all love a Christmas boogie but the festive season is the prime time for fraudsters and pickpockets. Take care to shield your PIN at cash points or when paying on card at a bar and think about the value of what's in your bag. Are you covered if your designer purse gets pinched?

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. 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.

7 SAVERS SAVING

It's never too early to start saving for next year. Just £10 a month could help 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, be wary of headline-grabbing interest rates. Ask the provider how long they'll last.

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. Most importantly, make sure you don't miss a repayment as this could mean an early end to any 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 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, facing the problem head-on can help sort things out. Contact your bank or lender straight away – they may be able to help. If your lender isn't acting in the festive spirit and you need assistance, ring the ombudsman and we can help.

3 FRENCH HOLIDAYS

If you plan to spend your festive season on the slopes or on a beach, don't forget travel insurance. 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!

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. So ring your insurer to ask before you rush Rover off for hydrotherapy.

AND THE OMBUDSMAN CAN HELP FOR FREE.

Last year, over 1,000 people downloaded the ombudsman's complaint form on Christmas Day. So if you get stuck with a financial problem, give us a call on **0300 123 9 123** or find us on Twitter **@financialombuds** and we'll point you in the right direction.