

GETTING YOUR FINANCES *into shape*

With 2015 now underway, why not take the time to turn over a new leaf, put the extravagance of the last few weeks behind you and resolve to get your health, fitness and finances back on track. It can be daunting to know where to start with all three, luckily, *Pride* has asked the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service with the power to sort out financial problems – for some handy tips to get you started with your financial wellbeing.

PAY BACK

Paying on a credit card does have its perks, it allows you to spread the cost and could offer you free protection if something goes wrong with your purchases or they don't show up. If you used credit cards for your Christmas shopping, keep a note of when the next payments are due – you could face hefty charges if your payments are late. If you were lucky enough to receive an interest free deal, keep a note of when the interest free period ends as repayments after this date can be expensive. And in the unfortunate situation that whatever you bought breaks or doesn't show up, get in touch with your card provider, you might be able to claim the money back.

TOO LONG TILL PAYDAY?

Christmas can take its toll on your bank account and it may feel like a long way

until your January pay cheque. Payday loans can seem like a quick way to cover any shortfall caused by the Christmas costs but may not always be as good as they seem. Make sure you know exactly what you are signing up to as they often have high interest rates or late payment fees, so you may end up paying back more than you thought. If you have a loan that you're struggling to repay, the lender has to take steps to help you – if you're finding it difficult to deal with them, contact the ombudsman.

PROTECT YOUR PRESENTS

If you were lucky enough to receive a new laptop, TV or other gadget this Christmas don't just tell your friends – tell your home insurer too. Don't just assume that your insurer will cover the value of your new items – take some time to check that they're actually covered. It's worth keeping the receipt or taking photos of your items to show proof of ownership, this will make things easier if you do have to make a claim in the future.

KEYS IN THE CAR

As you wake up to the cold January mornings there's nothing better than being able to get into a nice warm car. But don't leave your car unattended while the engine's running, or your insurer may not pay out should a passing opportunist thief decide to take it as a late Christmas gift. So while



it may be uncomfortable sitting in a defrosting car for 10 minutes – it'll be more uncomfortable being without a car and having to make an insurance claim.

IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY

Whether you wish it was Christmas every day or you are still recovering from the last one, it's never too early to start saving for the next festive season. Even saving a small amount each month can give you a nice pot to take the sting out of next Christmas. Planning for the future can also give you something to look forward to, which really takes the chill out of the January blues. **P**

Taking the steps above can help you change your money habits not just for January, but for good – leaving you just the diet and exercise plan to work on. But if a money problem does threaten to break your resolution the ombudsman may be able to help you stay on track on 0800 023 4 567 or find us on Twitter @financialombuds