



FACULTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

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Worried About Your Finances? How to Stress Less in Uneasy Times

Seven in ten Americans report that money is a significant source of stress. Work and the economy are top stressors too.

Source: 2009 *Stress in America* survey, American Psychological Association



Uncertainty is the norm, it seems, in more aspects of our lives every day. When uncertainty extends to our finances, it's normal to feel wary and worried. Who wouldn't feel uneasy not knowing whether the income they count on will be adversely affected as sweeping changes in health care take effect?

If you're losing sleep over money, you're not alone. According to the most recent *Stress in America* survey conducted by the American Psychological Association, 71 percent of Americans report that money is a significant source of stress. Besides keeping you awake at night, it could be showing up as anger, irritability, fatigue, lack of energy, headaches or depression.

Your stress may be compounded by concerns about the economy in general, shrinking reimbursements, the tightening of credit, accumulated debt, taxes and other worries about your family's finances.

So what can you do, today, to regain a sense of



control over your personal financial situation? One solution is to use your Faculty Assistance Program (FAP) benefit.

Faculty and physicians at USF Health tend to underutilize FAP, the very resource that may help them most. Yet the professionals who staff the program understand what you are going through. They

understand the health care environment and its associated stressors. It's their job to listen, offer assistance and guide you to financial counselors or advisers as needed, all in complete confidence.

Information about who uses the FAP benefit is never divulged.

Getting Past the Hurdles

It's not unusual for people with a high degree of professional responsibility and authority to overlook their own financial wellness. If you're hesitant to ask for help, consider that reducing

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What Stress Does to Us

The APA's *Stress in America* survey released in November 2009 asked respondents to report what physical effects of stress they had experienced in the past month. Among the responses:

- 47 percent of all adults report that they have lain awake at night;
- 45 percent report irritability or anger;
- 43 percent report fatigue;
- 40 percent report lack of interest, motivation or energy;
- 34 percent report headaches;
- 34 percent report feeling depressed or sad;
- 32 percent report feeling as though they could cry; and
- 27 percent report upset stomach or indigestion as a result of stress.

Financial Stress: Ease it With Some Good Decision Making

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stress is important to self-care. Take care of yourself by seeking help for financial stress before it reaches crisis proportions.

If you're like many high-achieving, high-earning professionals, you may feel some guilt about not paying much attention to your finances. Or, you may be reluctant to admit that you aren't an expert when it comes to managing money.

Admitting you don't know is a big hurdle to overcome, says Mark Guyott, vice president, client services for askAFS, LLC. "Doctors make hard decisions all the time. Yet there are medical situations in which they will seek out a more expert colleague to get the best outcome. It's no different with financial stress issues. It's OK to admit that you are not the expert in this area of your life, and then take action by consulting with a skilled specialist who can help you work

through a financial problem."

Working with a financial counselor may be just the prescription you need, and it's one of the many resources available to you through your Faculty Assistance Program. Unlike a financial adviser, whose specialty is investment advice and financial planning, a financial counselor can help you see more clearly the underlying issues that cause financial stress.

Wants vs. Needs

A financial counselor can help you look at what's working and what's not, with the goal of changing the situation that causes you stress.

"A good financial counselor will listen, without casting blame," says Guyott. "Often, finances come down to issues related to values, and sorting out *wants* from *needs*," says Guyott. "For example, sometimes our clients haven't considered that the reason they

have gone into debt to buy a new car is that their parents always did. Or they think it's expected of them, even when all they really need is reliable transportation. We help them look at the values, behavior, and actions that got them to the point of distress, and offer direction, guidance and manageable solution ideas."

Three Basic Steps

Guyott says there are three steps to resolving a stressful financial situation.

1. Ask yourself, "Can someone else help me with this?"
2. Ask "Am I willing to listen to someone else's direction?"
3. If you answered yes to both questions, it's time to contact a trusted expert to help you address the causes of your financial stress and develop an action plan for changing the situation. Sometimes we have to let go to learn.

Individuals who have a high degree of responsibility and authority in their professional lives sometimes overlook their own financial wellness.



Your Faculty Assistance Program: A Caring, Confidential Resource

We care about your wellbeing on and off the job. Your Faculty Assistance Program (FAP), administered by the professionals at Wood & Associates, is a confidential resource you can rely on, 24/7, when you need an assist during times of change, stress or crisis. This service is a faculty benefit. We're also a resource for helping you grow personally and professionally.

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Stress Management Techniques

Listening to music; exercising or walking; and reading ranked at the top of the list of stress management techniques people use most, according to the APA's 2009 *Stress in America* survey. When asked to select all of the techniques that applied to them, 36% of the respon-

dents said they watched television or movies, while the same percent spent time with friends or family.

Lower on the list are more unhealthy behaviors, including smoking (14%), drinking alcohol (14%) and gambling (4%). Surprisingly, only 4% reported seeking

help from a mental health professional in 2009. That percentage is down from the previous year's 7%.

For more information about stress, along with coping tips, visit the "Topics of Interest" section at www.woodassociates.net.