

# Let's Talk Finances

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## Time to Take a New Look at Your Money Habits



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The New Year holiday creates a feeling of starting fresh and inspires us to set new goals. While diets come to mind, setting new financial goals should be on the top of our lists. As you reflect on the past year, focus on your experiences – consider what worked and what didn't – to shape this year's money habits. Here are some ideas to reflect on as you set your financial goals for the New Year.

### **New Year, New Savings Account**

Think about what you want to save for in the coming year and commit to opening a dedicated savings account to reach that goal, whether it's creating an emergency fund or setting money aside for your kids' future college tuition. There are many types of savings accounts available to save for both short-term and long-term goals.

### **Pay Down That Old Debt in the New Year**

Confronting your debt and thinking about how to pay it off can be scary and overwhelming. Use the New Year to face your fears. Make a list of your debts, noting the monthly payment, current amount owed, and interest rate, and make a plan to start paying down the balances. Many experts recommend focusing on accounts with the highest interest rate or the lowest balance to pay off first.

### **Get Organized**

Keeping your finances organized will help you control your money and achieve your financial goals. Some basic tasks to help you get organized include making a budget, tracking your spending, and putting a system in place to ensure you pay your bills on time every month. Be sure to also monitor your credit card and bank statements for any unexpected fees or unusual activity. The sooner you find mistakes or unauthorized transactions, the easier it is to correct those issues.

### **Protect Your Money All Year, Every Year**

With so many financial transactions occurring electronically, it's important to proactively protect your personal information, including your credit card and bank account numbers. Use the New Year to take charge of protecting your money. Never provide your personal information in response to an unsolicited request, whether it is over the phone or on the Internet. Always monitor your bank and credit card statements and your credit reports for unusual activity. Catching abnormal transactions early will allow you to take steps to prevent more harm if your information has been stolen.