Your financial fitness affects your physical and emotional health. Consider that money, work and the economy are the leading causes of stress.

Stress upsets our emotions and makes us sick. In fact, a million people a day miss work at an average annual cost of $15 billion to the economy. Add to that an estimated $62 billion in productivity we lose to sleep deprivation caused by stress and the $200 billion spent on stress-related illnesses. The connection is clear between financial problems, our health and its impact on the economy.

Financial stress is believed to be one of the most important sources of stress since so many of our basic life activities cost money. Management of our money is one of the ways we can relieve this stress.

A scarcity of money resources affects the things we are able to enjoy. If you are worried about paying your bills, keeping a roof over your head and feeding your family, stress and anxiety are just around the corner.

Money is on the mind of many of us. Seventy six percent of Americans state that money is a significant stressor in their lives.

Usually I talk about concrete steps you can take to fix your money problems. Because my outlook is from my job as a family economist, I look at fixing the money side. On the other hand, some people look at the other side of the problem first, reducing the stress. I recently ran across some advice from the American Psychological Association to help reduce the stress from money problems. Some of the steps are similar, but they look at it from another angle. They list the following five steps.

Take stock of your money problems. Pay attention to what is happening around you, but don’t fall in with the “woe is me” crowd. Believing the gloomy predictions on the stock market and the economy can lead to anxiety and bad decisions. Remain calm and continue to work on your money problems.
Identify financial stressors and plan. Examine the depth of your money challenges. Write down ways to reduce problems and manage money more efficiently. If you are having problems paying your bills, call the lender and make arrangements for a different pay schedule.

Think about how you deal with money stress. Some of us relieve stress by turning to unhealthy activities, such as drinking, gambling or overeating. Be aware of how you are reacting and seek help from mental health professionals before it gets worse.

Look for opportunities for growth and change. Even though money can cause you to stress, look for healthier ways to deal with it. Take a walk (as long as you aren’t walking through a mall), learn a new skill to keep you busy, take an online course or look for low-cost resources in your community that can increase your earning power.

Ask for help. There are credit counseling services and financial planners to help you take control of your money situation. Some of these are low-cost or even free.

Whether you look at the money side or consider the stress side first, take positive steps in solving your problems. Don’t let the situation paralyze you.

**Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.**

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