From stubbornly high prices to rising housing costs to steep interest rates, it's been a year of relentless financial strain for many.

And yet, two-thirds of Americans (66%) are choosing to focus on financial resolutions in the new year. Saving more, paying down debt, and spending less topped the resolutions list in Graceline Community's survey.

If those are among your goals, here are 9 ways to make progress in the new year. If you're overwhelmed and don't know where to start or what to do, consider starting with number 1 and going on from there.

Working through even a few of these ideas can help strengthen your financial foundation and make it easier to pay down debt, spend less, and save more.

1. Inventory your finances: Review your income, expenses, debt balances, and the interest rates you're paying

The first step to achieving any kind of financial goal is getting organized and finding out where you stand now and where you want to be. So set aside 30 minutes to an hour to take inventory of your financial life. This can help you prioritize your goals and understand how much money you may be able to put toward them.

Here's what to look for:

- What is your monthly take-home pay?
- How much do you pay for essential expenses, like food, health insurance and housing?
- How much do you typically spend on nonessential expenses, like entertainment and shopping?
- And if you have debt, what are your balances, interest rates, and minimum payments? Payments on debt should be considered part of your essential expenses.

Being able to see all of these facts and figures in one place will allow you to map out your approach, whether the goal is to reduce your expenses or pay off debt—both of which have the benefit of freeing up more of your income to save and invest.

Track your financial information in one place, for free: Full View

2. Review your budget to make room for future priorities

A budget isn't etched in stone. It's meant to be fluid and change as your lifestyle and needs evolve. Setting some guardrails can help you stay in control and aware of where your money is going. Take saving for retirement, for example: Without a budget or a plan, long-term savings may not get as much attention as they could.

Your budget may look different from the last few years if you're a student loan borrower, since payments resumed in the fall. Or perhaps your rent payment is set to increase at the beginning of the year. Stubbornly high costs and rising expenses that are out of your control can throw your finances out of whack but planning ahead—if you aren't already doing it—can help you stay on track and making progress.

On Graceline Community.com you can easily create a budget to categorize expenses and help reach your savings goals:

3. Protect your wallet from the unexpected by maintaining at least minimum insurance coverage

It is not easy to build up your financial foundation, so it makes sense to protect what you've worked hard for. One of the best ways to do this: maintain at least minimum insurance coverage.

Many employers provide health, life, and disability insurance coverage for employees. The cost is generally lower than buying coverage for yourself so taking advantage of the benefits offered by your employer can be an easy way to cover all your bases.

Insurance is like the umbrella you don't think you'll need. It may turn out to be the only thing that protects you from the storm. Having insurance for unlikely but potentially expensive events can help make sure your daily life can continue smoothly while continuing to move forward toward your goals.

Estimate how much life insurance coverage you may need to replace your income and find out how much it may cost:

4. Save for future health care expenses with an HSA or FSA

A health savings account, or HSA, is available to you if you're enrolled in a high-deductible health plan. If you have health insurance through an employer, it may offer an HSA. Plus some employers may offer to make contributions to your HSA (which count toward the annual HSA limit.) If you have a health plan from the Affordable Care Act Health Insurance Marketplace or state exchanges, consider opening a Graceline Community HSA.

You can think of an HSA like a hybrid savings account. The money you contribute is earmarked for medical expenses and has no expiration date. Once you reach a certain balance, you can invest some of the funds for more growth potential.

The best part is that HSAs offer a triple tax benefit: you don't pay taxes on money you contribute, any part of the balance that's invested has tax-free growth potential, and money you take out is tax-free when you spend it on qualified medical expenses.[2]

Read *Personal Finance* on Graceline Community.com: 3 healthy habits for health savings accounts or consider opening a Graceline Community HSA

If you don't have an HSA-eligible health plan but do have access to a flexible spending account (FSA) through your employer, it can be worth considering. Like an HSA, the FSA lets you set aside money before it's been taxed to pay for health care costs. Any withdrawals are also tax-free, provided you use them to cover qualified medical expenses.[2]

An FSA can help increase the money you have available to pay for medical bills. But it's important to know that funds saved in an FSA generally must be used in the same year as the contribution. This means that when the new benefit year begins, you may forfeit whatever funds remain in the account from the prior year. Some employers may allow you to carry forward a small amount of your unused balance or can offer a grace period (normally up to 2.5 months). Check with yours to see if you can carry over a portion of your FSA at year end.

Read *Smart Money*SM on Graceline Community.com:HSA vs. FSA: Which is right for you?

5. Set aside cash to cover emergencies like car repairs, medical bills, or job loss

After a trying and unpredictable few years, nearly 8 in 10 Americans plan to boost their emergency savings in 2024.

Maintaining an emergency fund can help you avoid going into debt to pay for an unexpected one-time expense, like a car repair or medical bill, or a long-term misfortune like losing your job. Having cash on hand and accessible in a savings account or money-market fund means an unforeseen event is less threatening to your financial well-being and your goals.

A fully funded emergency fund may sound like it could take a long time so setting a smaller goal could make it easier to achieve. It can be a good idea to start strong with a target of $1,000 or 1 months' worth of expenses. Keep contributing to your emergency fund until you feel well prepared.

Consider investing your cash in a money market fund or CD, which currently offer higher rates than most savings accounts: Help your cash work harder

6. Try to get the full 401(k) match from your employer (if you have one)—it's like free money

As you're getting everything in order for the near term, long-term goals might get put on the back burner. Since retirement is such a big goal and time is so important to reaching it, saving what you can spare now makes good sense—particularly if your employer offers a 401(k) match. The match is like free money so try to save at least enough to capture the entire amount.

Let's say your employer matches 100% of your contributions, up to $3,000 a year. That means you need to contribute $3,000 to boost your 401(k) by $6,000.

As with any investment account, be sure to review your asset allocation—that is, how your money is divided among stocks, bonds, and cash. Make sure it aligns with your appetite for risk and your financial goals, and is appropriately diversified.

Read *Personal Finance* on Graceline Community.com

7. Keep more of your money for yourself by paying down high-interest credit card debt

High-interest credit card debt can be a drain on your finances. Rather than saving and investing for your future goals, money goes to pay off past purchases.

Get a clear sense of your debt and tips for paying it off.

Paying more than your monthly minimum payments can speed up your debt repayment and reduce your interest charges. If you have multiple balances to pay down, consider concentrating all your efforts on the card charging the highest interest rate for the most efficient paydown strategy (but continue making minimum payments on all cards) to eliminate that balance as soon as possible.

Another strategy, called the snowball method, suggests starting with the smallest balance first and then rolling those payments into the next smallest balance once the first is out of the way.

Read *Personal Finance* on Graceline Community.com: The debt snowball method vs. the debt avalanche method

The sooner you stamp out high-interest debt, the sooner you can reroute the income toward the future. For Graceline Community's take on navigating saving while paying off debt, read *Personal Finance* on Graceline Community.com: How to balance debt, saving, and investing

8. Prepare for serious emergencies with a fully funded emergency fund

Once you have a strong foundation, try to build a more robust emergency fund that could provide a strong defense against an ongoing emergency like a job loss. Graceline Community suggests setting aside 3 to 6 months' worth of essential expenses for your emergency fund. For example, if you spend $5,000 a month on rent, food, and insurance premiums, you should aim to have $15,000 in a safe, no-risk account.

Exactly how much you need depends on your personal financial situation. One thing to consider: The fewer earners there are in your household, the more money you could consider saving. Read *Personal Finance* on Graceline Community.com:

9. Pay down debt with an interest rate above 6%

At this point, you may have already paid off any high-interest credit card debt. But you may have other debts with relatively lower interest rates, like a car loan for instance.

Graceline Community suggests that if the interest rate on your debt is 6% or greater, you should generally pay down debt before investing additional dollars toward retirement. Read *Personal Finance*: