



Ruth Brock  
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News Release

## **Managing Your Finances**

Have you ever thought about how much time and money you spend paying your monthly bills? Have you considered paying your bills online? By doing this, you can simplify your life and save money. The following are suggestions for managing your finances more efficiently.

### **Deposit your paycheck directly into your bank account.**

This saves you a trip to the bank each pay period and it keeps the money from creating a temptation since you will not actually handle your paycheck. Another advantage is that the money shows up in your account the day the check is issued, even if you are out of town or home sick. Most employers offer direct deposit. You just need to fill out a form in your human resources department and provide a voided check from the account into which you wish to have your money deposited.

### **Save without thinking.**

You may have the best of intentions to start saving, but by the end of the month, all your money is spent. The trick is to pay yourself first without having to make a conscious decision to do so. There are two easy ways to do this: Arrange with your employer for a direct deposit of a portion of your paycheck into your savings account and the rest into your checking, or make the arrangement through your bank.

### **Fully fund your retirement plan that may be available through your employer.**

If you do not pay into a retirement account, you are walking away from free money. Arrange to have a portion of your pay diverted into an investment of your choice. Remember that you pay into these accounts with pre-tax dollars.

### **Pay your bills online.**

You can pay most recurring bills automatically, including credit cards, utilities, phone lines, cable, and student loans, without having to mess with deposit slips, stamps, and envelopes. In addition, you will never miss a payment. Everything sticks to the schedule you set. You can arrange for automatic bill pay directly with each company. This can be time consuming at first, but it is usually free. Once you have got it set up, you can forget about it. Another way to pay online is to consolidate your bill paying with a single service from your bank, credit union or broker, or go through an online provider such as AOL, MSN, Quicken, or Yahoo. Make sure you read the fine print about fees, though.

Some may provide the service free with no strings attached. Others may require a minimum account balance or regular bill-paying activity to waive fees.

**Track your spending.**

There are many tools available to help you set up a budget. If you need some help in creating your budget, stop by your local Alabama Cooperative Extension System office and pick up a Money Management Calendar. You can also use computer software such as Excel, Microsoft Money, or Quicken. Some banks provide a free online spending report for customers. It tracks your online bill payments, credit and debit card purchases then divides them up into categories for you to see where your money is going.

Try putting some of these suggestions into practice and see if you have more time to do things you enjoy!

*For more information on this or related topics, contact Ruth Brock, Regional Extension Agent for Consumer Science and Personal Financial Management. You can reach her at the St. Clair County office at (205) 338-9416 or email at [brockru@auburn.edu](mailto:brockru@auburn.edu).*

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