

Money and mindset

Financial wellness is more than numbers

You don't have to love spreadsheets to do well with money. What financial well-being really means, and how to take one small step.

5-minute read • Updated October 2026 • Checked against its sources



The short version

- ✓ The CFPB defines financial well-being as meeting your obligations, feeling secure about the future and having the freedom to enjoy life.
- ✓ Money quizzes trip up most people: in 2024, only 46% of adults got at least four of seven right, and 4% got all seven. You don't need to be a numbers person.
- ✓ Check in with how money makes you feel, then pair that feeling with one small, doable step.

From a nonprofit. Every volunteer adviser is a fiduciary, which means they must put your interests first. We never sell your information.

Rather talk it through?

A volunteer financial adviser can help with your situation, one-on-one, for free.



Point your phone's camera at the code, or go to:

go.advisersgiveback.org/start

1

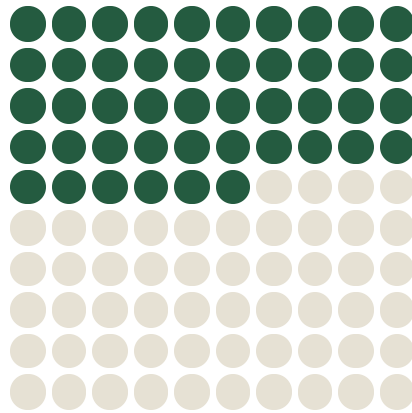
Money is more than math

Money can feel hard for a lot of reasons. Sometimes it's the math. Sometimes it's the stress. Sometimes it's the mental load of keeping track of everything. Not everyone's brain loves numbers, and that's okay.

If money questions make your head spin, you're in good company. In 2024, the FINRA Foundation asked adults seven basic questions about things like interest, inflation and risk. Just 46% got at least four right, and only 4% got all seven. ¹

Money quizzes trip up most people

Adults who answered at least four of seven basic financial questions correctly, 2024



46%

answered at least four of seven questions correctly. Only 4% got all seven.

The questions cover interest, inflation, risk, mortgages, interest on debt, bond prices and probability.

Source: FINRA Investor Education Foundation, Financial Capability in the United States: Results from the FINRA Foundation's National Financial Capability Study (6th Edition) (July 2025)

Knowledge is linked with doing better: people who score higher on these quizzes tend to have an easier time making ends meet. ¹ And anyone can learn, one idea at a time. But doing well with money isn't about being naturally good at spreadsheets. It's about finding ways to manage money that work for you.

2

What financial well-being really means

So what does doing well with money look like? The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) set out to answer that. Its researchers held in-depth, open-ended interviews with a wide range of people across the country, and listened to how they described a good financial life. ²

The CFPB defines financial well-being as “a state of being wherein a person can fully meet current and ongoing financial obligations, can feel secure in their financial future, and is able to make choices that allow enjoyment of life.” ² It breaks that into four parts: ²

- **Control.** You manage your day-to-day, month-to-month money. Bills get paid on time, and you're not worried about getting by.
- **A cushion.** You can absorb a money shock, like an emergency car repair or a short layoff.
- **Being on track.** You're working toward your goals, like paying off a student loan or saving for a home.

- **Freedom.** You can make choices that let you enjoy life, like going out to dinner, taking a trip or being generous.

Notice what's missing: a dollar amount. The CFPB found that well-being isn't strictly tied to income. Some people who are far from wealthy feel secure, while some people with much higher incomes don't. ² Well-being and income are related. But in a national survey, the CFPB found that its measure captured something "fundamentally different" from income: a person's sense of security and freedom of choice. ³

The CFPB's researchers also saw reason for hope. Through learning and effort, and with reasonable opportunity and support, people appeared able to move toward greater financial well-being. ² Where you are now isn't where you have to stay.

One thing stood out: savings. People's well-being lined up closely with how much savings they could reach. ³ That's one reason even a small cushion can do so much. Our guide to [building an emergency fund](#) shows how to start.

Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/not-if-but-when/

3

Why feelings belong in the plan

Money is emotional, whether we admit it or not. It can make you feel calm one minute and spiraling the next. In 2024, 63% of adults said thinking about their finances can make them anxious. ¹

When we pretend money is pure logic, the feelings don't go away. Often we just avoid money altogether. Naming how money makes you feel can help you move forward instead of staying stuck. It turns a vague sense of dread into something you can work with.

If avoiding money is a pattern for you, our guide to [why we avoid our finances](#) has gentle ways back in.

Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/why-we-avoid-our-finances/

4

A quick money feelings check

Take a moment and ask yourself: how is my money making me feel right now? Maybe you're overwhelmed. Maybe you're anxious, curious, motivated or totally fine. There are no wrong answers.

This is just information, not a report card.

Once you've named the feeling, pair it with one small, doable action:

- **Feeling overwhelmed?** Check just one account. One small task can bring clarity, and the push to take the next step.

- **Feeling anxious?** Write down what's worrying you, with pen and paper. Getting it out of your head can help you sort it out.
- **Feeling curious?** Learn one new money idea. You can [browse more ideas in Resources](#).
Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/
- **Feeling motivated?** Set up one automatic transfer to savings, or one automatic bill payment. Our guide to [letting automation do the work](#) shows how.
Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/let-automation-do-the-work/
- **Feeling fine?** Enjoy it. Then put a date on your calendar to check in again.

Small, realistic steps count for far more than perfect plans.

5

Check your well-being, your way

If you'd like a fuller picture, the CFPB has an online questionnaire. You answer ten questions about your situation, like whether you could handle a major unexpected expense. It doesn't ask for any personal financial data, such as account numbers or balances. You get a score, steps you can take, and a comparison with U.S. adults from the CFPB's national survey. The CFPB says it never collects or stores your answers. ⁴



Try it this week

Take the CFPB's [financial well-being questionnaire](#). Then look at the statements you'd most like to answer differently a year from now. Pick one, and choose one small step toward it.

Your score isn't a grade. It's a starting point you can come back to, and a way to see your progress that has nothing to do with being a numbers person.

6

Real financial wellness

Financial wellness is about building a money life that supports you instead of stressing you out. When you tune in to how money makes you feel, it gets easier to act, and to build habits that stick.

If money stress is weighing on your mood or your sleep, see our guide to [money and mood](#). And if old beliefs keep getting in your way, try [what's your money script?](#)

Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/money-and-mood/

Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/whats-your-money-script/

A volunteer adviser can help you turn those feelings into a plan, one step at a time, with no judgment about where you're starting.

Questions to bring to your adviser

A volunteer adviser is ready when you are.

A volunteer adviser can look at your numbers with you and help you decide what to do first.

go.advisersgiveback.org/start



Sources

1. FINRA Investor Education Foundation, Financial Capability in the United States: Results from the FINRA Foundation's National Financial Capability Study (6th Edition), July 2025. Online survey of 25,539 adults, June to October 2024: pages 4, 29 and 31.
finrafoundation.org/sites/finrafoundation/files/2025-07/NFCS-Report-Sixth-Edition-July-2025.pdf

2. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Financial well-being: The goal of financial education, January 2015. The definition and its four elements: pages 18 to 20.
files.consumerfinance.gov/f/201501_cfpb_report_financial-well-being.pdf
3. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Financial well-being in America, September 2017. Findings from the CFPB's National Financial Well-Being Survey: page 9.
files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/201709_cfpb_financial-well-being-in-America.pdf

4. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Find out your financial well-being, Accessed September 2026.
consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/financial-well-being/

Updated October 2026. This guide is general information, not advice for your situation. We check every number against its source; if something has changed, tell us at advisersgiveback.org/contact. Read it online, with its calculators and videos, at advisersgiveback.org/resources/financial-wellness-is-more-than-numbers/. Advisers Give Back is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit (EIN 84-4685390), and we never sell your information.