

Money and mindset

How money stress and mental health are linked

Money stress and mental health are closely linked, and each can make the other harder. Small, kind steps can help ease the cycle.

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



The short version

- ✓ In 2025, 66% of adults said money was a significant source of stress in their lives, and money worries keep many people up at night.
- ✓ Studies link money problems with depression and anxiety, and the effects can run both ways. It's common, and it's not a personal failing.
- ✓ Start with one small step, and reach out. If money stress is affecting your health or safety, talk to a doctor or counselor, or call or text 988.

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 and mood are linked

Trouble sleeping? Feeling distracted, jittery or on edge? Sometimes the cause isn't your calendar or your inbox. It's your wallet.

Money is one of the most common sources of stress. In a 2025 survey for the American Psychological Association, 66% of adults said money was a significant source of stress in their lives. Even more, 75%, said the same about the economy.¹

Two in three adults say money is a significant source of stress

Adults who rated each as a significant source of stress in their lives, 2025



Three money-related items from a longer list of stressors. Survey of 3,199 adults in August 2025.

Source: American Psychological Association, Stress in America 2025: A Crisis of Connection (November 2025)

Money worries also keep many people up at night. In a 2025 online poll commissioned by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, 78% of adults said they had lost sleep over money. That was the most common worry in the survey, ahead of work, crime and politics.²

If that sounds like you, you're in very large company. Feeling the weight of money isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong.

2

A loop that can run both ways

When you feel financially shaky, it can be harder to focus, rest and feel safe. And when you're struggling emotionally, money tasks can feel harder to manage. Research backs up the link.

- **Money stress and depression often show up together.** A 2022 review of 40 studies found that financial stress was linked with depression in most of them. The link showed up in both wealthier and poorer countries. It was generally stronger for people with low incomes or little wealth.³
- **Debt is part of the picture.** A 2013 review of 65 research papers found that people with debt were more likely to have depression and other mental health problems. The authors noted that it's hard to prove which one causes the other.⁴
- **The effects can run in both directions.** A 2020 review in the journal *Science* looked at research designed to test cause and effect. It found that money shocks can harm mental health, and that programs such as cash payments can improve it. It also found that mental illness can make it harder to work and earn, and that treatment can bring economic gains.⁵

Most of these studies show links, not proof that one thing causes the other. But together they point the same way. Money stress and mental health are closely tied, and help with one may ease the other. None of it means that money trouble is a personal failing.

3

Worry takes up room in your head

Many people find that money stress makes it harder to think about anything else. In a well-known 2013 study, researchers asked shoppers at a New Jersey mall to think through four everyday money problems, such as a car repair. For some shoppers, the costs were small, like \$150 for the repair. For others, they were large, like \$1,500. Then everyone took two short tests of thinking skills. ⁶

When the costs were small, people with lower and higher incomes did about the same. When the costs were large, people with lower incomes did worse, while people with higher incomes did not. The researchers saw a similar pattern among sugarcane farmers in India. The same farmers did better on the tests after harvest, when they had more money, than before it. ⁶

Other researchers have questioned how the study's data were analyzed, ⁷ and later studies have been mixed. One study of lower-income U.S. households found no difference in thinking-test scores before and after payday. ⁸ And when another team repeated 20 studies on scarcity, not all of them about money, most of the effects didn't show up again, though the original researchers have challenged how that project was done. ^{9 10}

Still, many people know the feeling: when money worry is loud, it's harder to focus on anything else. That isn't a sign you're less capable. It's a good reason to make money tasks as simple as you can.

4

Small steps that can help

You don't have to fix everything at once. Small, clear actions can make money feel more manageable, and each one gives you a little more control. Try one of these:

1**Name what's weighing on you.**

Is it a bill you haven't opened? A balance you haven't checked? Write it down in plain words. A worry on paper can feel smaller than the one in your head.

2**Take one small action.**

Set a calendar reminder, check one account or list the bills due in the next few weeks.

3**Give worry its own time.**

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine suggests setting aside time to think through worries when you aren't trying to sleep. It also suggests keeping a pad and paper by the bed, so you can write down thoughts and let them go. ²

4**Reach out.**

A friend, a counselor or a financial adviser can help. Asking for help isn't a failure. It's a step toward stability.

**Try this tonight**

Before bed, write down the money worry that's on your mind. Under it, write one small step you'll take tomorrow. Then let the paper hold it for the night.

For more gentle ways to get started, see our guide to [why we avoid our finances](#).

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

Because the loop runs both ways, it also helps to plan for hard days while you're feeling steady. Set up a few things that keep working when you're not at your best: automatic payments for bills you can cover in full, reminders for the rest, and a small cushion for surprises. Our guides to [putting the basics on autopilot](#) and [building an emergency fund](#) show how.

Online: advisersgiveback.org/resources/protect-your-energy/

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

5

When to get more support

Money stress is common, but it shouldn't take over your life. If it's affecting your sleep, your health or your safety, it's worth talking to a doctor or a counselor. They can help with the stress itself while you work on the money side. If cost is a worry, call the National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357, run by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). It's free, confidential and open 24/7, and it can often point people with little or no insurance to places that charge on a sliding scale or accept Medicare or Medicaid.¹¹

**If you're in crisis**

If you're thinking about suicide, or you're in emotional distress, you can call or text 988, or chat online at 988lifeline.org. That reaches the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which is there for anyone in the United States, 24/7.¹² It's free and confidential.¹³ You can call, text or chat in English or Spanish. Veterans, service members and their families can call 988 and press 1 for the Veterans Crisis Line.¹² If someone is in physical danger or there's a medical emergency, call 911.¹²

A volunteer adviser can help with the money side: a plan for bills, debt and savings that fits your life. That's financial planning, not mental health care. But the two can work well side by side, and a clear plan can take some of the weight off.

You don't have to fix everything at once. You only have to begin with one clear, kind step.

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.

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