

Getting help with debt



Dealing with **debt problems**

Information and advice to help you **love later life**

When should I seek help?

Many people find they get into debt, and for a wide range of reasons. Whether you owe £50 or £50,000, if debt has become a concern for you, then it's important to take steps to tackle it.

You may want to seek help if you are:

- worrying about money
- struggling to pay your household bills or paying them with credit
- relying on your overdraft or credit card to get by
- missing credit repayments
- hiding your spending habits from your family
- avoiding letters and calls from your creditors.

If any of these apply to you, it could be time to get some help.

If you're worried about someone

If you're concerned that a family member or friend is having problems with debt, keep an eye out for signs such as:

- hiding post
- being unusually secretive about money and finances
- getting phone calls from unknown callers
- struggling to make ends meet
- avoiding activities they used to enjoy
- asking to borrow money.

If you think someone is having problems with debt, try to encourage them to seek help. They will need to make the decision to get advice themselves, but just being there to support and listen to them could make a big difference.

Getting advice

The sooner you seek help, the sooner you will be able to manage your debt.

A debt adviser can help you come up with a budget and a plan to pay back your debts, or suggest other solutions. They should advise you on how to contact your creditors (the people you owe money to) to arrange any repayments. Some advisers will negotiate with your creditors for you.

Even if you feel nervous about getting help, it's best to seek advice so you can start to move towards managing your debt.

If you're facing an emergency, such as eviction or having no access to money, let the advisor know as they may be able to prioritise giving you an appointment as soon as possible.

There is no need to pay for advice when there's a lot of free, confidential, independent help out there. You may have seen adverts for debt-management companies, which often charge fees for their advice. Some offer to help with consolidating debt, which often involves taking out a loan to pay off all your debts and repaying just the one loan. Don't be tempted to take on more debt as this could make things worse.

Sources of free help and advice

Here are some organisations that offer free help with debt. All are registered charities and offer free and confidential advice. Contact details are listed on pages 8–10.

- **Your local Age UK** should be able to direct you to organisations that can help. Some local Age UKs may also offer debt advice.
- **Age Scotland** can help you find debt advice face-to-face, by phone, email or online in Scotland.
- **Advice UK** can help you find free independent debt and money advice in England, Scotland and Wales.
- **Citizens Advice** offers help face-to-face, by phone or by email.
- **Debt Advice Foundation** provides debt advice and support through its helpline in England and Wales, and through its website.
- **National Debtline** provides advice over the phone, online and by email for people living in England, Wales and Scotland. They can send you a free self-help information pack.
- **Scotland's Financial Health Service**, a Scottish government website, can help you find debt and money management advice.
- **StepChange Debt Charity** provides advice over the phone or online through its Debt Remedy tool, providing a personal action plan and a recommendation of solutions for dealing with debts.

Some organisations in the UK offer face-to-face advice. However, if this isn't available near you or you have trouble getting to appointments, you can still get telephone advice. There are benefits to getting help over the phone:

- You can get an appointment at a time that suits you.
- You don't have to travel to see an adviser.
- You can have everything to hand at home that you need.
- You can talk in the privacy of your own home.

What to expect from your appointment

Depending on which debt advice service you use, these are some of the things you can expect from your appointment:

- They will ask about your debts and your creditors so they can advise you on the options for dealing with them.
- You'll be given the opportunity to explain your income and your outgoings, so the adviser can help you complete a budget.
- The adviser will ask you about your circumstances, such as whether you own your home, so they can understand your personal situation and what options might suit you best.
- The adviser may also carry out a benefits check to make sure you're claiming all the money that you're entitled to.
- The adviser will talk you through all the options and identify what steps to take next.

It will be helpful to have your paperwork to hand, such as bank statements, evidence of your income and letters from creditors (see 'Preparing for your appointment' on page 7).



While you're waiting for your appointment

If you have to wait a few weeks for your appointment, here are some useful things to do in the meantime.

Keep paying your **priority debts** if you can. These debts are the ones that have the most serious consequences if not paid. They include:

- mortgage
- second mortgage or secured loan
- rent
- Council Tax
- gas or electricity
- TV licence
- unpaid fines
- hire purchase
- telephone (if you rely on it)
- water
- court judgment or fine.

Non-priority bills can include catalogue debts, credit card debts, unsecured personal loans and money borrowed from friends and family.

Know your rights when dealing with creditors. If your creditors contact you while you are waiting for your appointment, tell them that you are seeking advice. They should agree to give you breathing space. If they keep pressuring you, talk to your debt adviser about what to do.

Remember the following rules:

- **Creditors** can't call you at unreasonable times, take payments without your permission or add unreasonable charges.
- **Bailiffs** (England and Wales) can't turn up without notice. They must give at least seven days' notice of their first visit.
- **Sheriff officers** (Scotland) can't recover items for debt payments without an exceptional attachment order from a Sheriff. Even if they have one, they can't turn up between 8pm and 8am, on a Sunday, or without warning.
- **Debt collectors** can't force entry, take anything from your house, or demand cash payments from you.
- **Energy suppliers** can't disconnect you without notice. If everyone in your house is over State Pension age, your supplier can't cut off your energy supply between 1 October and 31 March. If only one person in your house is over State Pension age then the supplier should take steps to avoid cutting your supply in the winter.

Increasing your income

To help you pay your priority debts, make sure you're receiving all the money you're entitled to.

You can use our benefits calculator to help identify any benefits you can claim at ageuk.org.uk/benefits-check or your local Age UK can help.

Other options to consider include:

- saving money by switching energy supplier
- applying for concessionary travel from your local council
- applying for grants from charitable organisations. Turn2Us (page 10) or your local Age UK can support in identifying grants.

Preparing for your appointment

Once you have an appointment to speak to a debt adviser, try to make sure you have the following things to hand:

- Bank statements for the past three months.
- How much you owe and to who.
- Information on how old your debts are.
- Any letters or demands from your creditors.
- Pen and paper to take notes.

It can be important to tell the debt adviser if any of the following information applies to your situation:

- The debts belonged to a spouse, partner or civil partner who died.
- The debts come from signing an agreement or a loan that you didn't properly understand.

For more information about the topics covered in this guide, see our factsheet *Dealing with debt*.

Useful organisations

Age UK

We provide advice and information for older people through our Age UK Advice Line, publications and online. Our publications are available in large print and audio formats.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65

Lines are open seven days a week from 8am to 7pm.

www.ageuk.org.uk

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact

Age Cymru: 0800 022 3444

www.agecymru.org.uk

In Northern Ireland, contact

Age NI: 0808 808 7575

www.ageni.org

In Scotland, contact

Age Scotland: 0800 124 4222

www.agescotland.org.uk

The evidence sources used to create this guide are available on request. Contact resources@ageuk.org.uk

Advice UK

Network of independent advice providers across England, Scotland and Wales.

www.adviceuk.org.uk/money-debt-advice

Citizens Advice

National network of advice centres offering free, confidential and independent advice, face-to-face or by phone.

In Wales, there is a national phone service on 0344 477 2020.

It is available in some parts of England on 0344 411 1444.

In Scotland, there is a national phone advice service on 0808 800 9060.

For online information and to find details of your nearest Citizens Advice in:

England or Wales: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Northern Ireland: www.citizensadvice.org.uk/nireland

Scotland: www.cas.org.uk

Debt Advice Foundation

Debt Advice Foundation is a registered national debt advice and education charity offering free, confidential support and advice to anyone worried about loans, credit and debt.

Tel: 0800 043 40 50

www.debtadvicefoundation.org

National Debtline

National helpline for people with debts, giving advice and support. Visit their My Money Steps website to get a personalised action plan.

Tel: 0808 808 4000

www.nationaldebtline.org

www.mymoneysteps.org

Scotland's Financial Health Service

Scottish government website offering money and debt advice, with details of local advice services.

www.scotlandsfinancialhealthservice.gov.uk

StepChange Debt Charity

A charity that provides free independent debt advice and a range of debt solutions. Call their freephone helpline or go online to use their Debt Remedy tool.

Tel: 0800 138 1111

www.stepchange.org

Turn2us

Helps people access the money available to them – through welfare benefits, grants and other help.

Tel: 0808 802 2000

www.turn2us.org.uk

Providing the information and advice you need to help you love later life.

We're Age UK and our goal is to enable older people across the UK to love later life. Whether you're enjoying your later life or going through tough times, we're here to help you make the best of your life.

We rely on donations from our supporters to provide our guides and factsheets for free. If you would like to help us continue to provide vital services, support, information and advice, please make a donation today by visiting www.ageuk.org.uk/donate or by calling **0800 169 87 87**.



If contact details for your local Age UK are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.

This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action.

Neither Age UK nor any of its subsidiary companies or charities accepts responsibility to ensure any information is up to date and accurate. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, websites, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK or any of its subsidiary companies or charities.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is Tavis House, 1-6 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9NA. Age UK and its subsidiary companies and charities form the Age UK Group, dedicated to helping more people love later life. ID204041 11/18
Next review date: November 2020