



Rands, cents, and stress

Hands up if you're tossing and turning, constantly worrying about balancing your bond, bills, school fees, and other expenses while trying to chip away at your debt. You're not alone! Did you know this financial stress and anxiety might actually be making you sick?

According to Hayley Parry, a financial coach at [Truth About Money](#), financial stress is one of the leading causes of health problems. This stress might manifest as aches, tiredness (often caused by sleep deprivation), mood swings, and feelings of fear and anger. Worries about money are frequently accompanied by a sense of shame, since most of us don't like to admit that we're struggling.

Financial stress can also impact our relationships. Parry reported that statistics from one of Truth About Money's partners revealed that the company processed over 4,000 divorces in a single month. "Financial stress was the leading reason for the breakdown of these marriages," she noted.

Perhaps one of the worst facets of financial stress is that it is always at the back of your mind. You may find that it feels almost impossible to shift your thoughts away from your wallet – and yet, the more you dwell on it, the worse your physical and emotional symptoms become.

Financial anxiety and your health

A growing body of research confirms the strong connection between financial anxiety and physical and mental health problems, particularly over the long term. Numerous studies have linked money worries to anxiety and depression, pain and inflammation, heart disease, high blood pressure, headaches, insomnia, ulcers, back pain, arthritis, and asthma, among other ailments, as well as a higher risk of disability and early death.

In fact, a [study](#) published earlier this year by a team of British researchers suggests that, of the serious life challenges that people face (including divorce, disability, caregiving, illness, and bereavement), financial strain is the most detrimental to health.



Why are money worries so detrimental to health?

Scientists say the body's physiological response to stress is a key factor. Persistent stress triggers complex biological interactions. This includes the release of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline into the bloodstream that interrupt normal body functioning. Over time, it can lead to inflammation, a weakened immune system, elevated blood pressure, and other long-term threats to good health.

How we react

Behavioural responses to financial stress also play a role. When money is tight, people often forgo visits to the doctor, postpone medical treatment, or stop taking medication in an effort to save.

Being on the wrong medical aid plan, for example, a hospital plan instead of a more comprehensive plan, can lead to unexpected or unbudgeted out-of-pocket expenses that can increase stress and anxiety. Stress is also linked to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as exercising less, drinking more, and eating junk food.

Finding a better way

That's why it's essential to develop a healthier relationship with money, says Cara-Lisa Sham, strategic consultant of the well-being platform soSerene.

The first step is to access financial education, as this will teach you how to manage your finances more effectively. "We've witnessed financial stress decrease by 74% once someone teaches themselves how to make better financial decisions," Sham says.

This will relieve feelings of helplessness that lead to stress. The reality is that many factors related to money – like interest rate increases, the rise in medical costs such as hospitalisation, and specialist fees – are out of our control. Controlling what we can contributes to our mental and physical well-being.

Change your mindset

Sham says we need to change how we think about money. "What we resist persists, so you need to make peace with your current financial situation, and acknowledge that it is temporary and can be changed. This, in turn, will calm your mind and lead to prioritising your health and overall well-being."

Adopt a mindset of abundance, says Sham. When you approach money with gratitude, you shift your mindset from scarcity to abundance, attracting more prosperity into your life. "Respect money: don't abuse it, but don't be a slave to it either. Never let it be the reason for what you do," Sham concludes.

Financial stress may be a reality for many South Africans, but it doesn't have to control your life. By educating yourself, changing your mindset, and taking practical steps to manage your money, you can alleviate stress and lead a healthier life.