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Tune in to Jeffrey's podcast, *Financial Focus*, by visiting http://financialconceptsmesquite.com/podcast/

Sweet Potato Pancakes with Cinnamon Cream

Ingredients

- 8 oz. cream cheese, softened.
- 1/4 c. packed brown sugar.
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/2 c. sour cream
- 6 large eggs, room temperature
- 3/4 c. all-purpose flour
- 1/2 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1/4 tsp pepper
- 6 c. shredded peeled sweet potatoes (about 3 large)
- 3 c. shredded peeled apples (about 3 large)
- 1/3 c. grated onion
- 1/2 c. canola oil

Directions

https://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/sweet-potato-pancakes-with-cinnamon-cream/

1. In a small bowl, beat the cream cheese, brown sugar, and cinnamon until blended; beat in sour cream. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, whisk the eggs, flour, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Add the sweet potatoes, apples, and onion; toss to coat.
3. In a large nonstick skillet, heat 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat. Working in batches, drop sweet potato mixture by 1/3 capfuls into oil; press slightly to flatten. Fry until golden brown, 2-3 minutes on each side, using remaining oil as needed. Drain on paper towels. Serve with cinnamon topping.

Jeffrey Bird-RICP®

Financial Focus

A Monthly Insight Into Your Finances

November 2023

How to Get Out of Debt

A *U.S. News and World Report* article, 16 Things to Do When You're Deep in Debt, offers some potentially useful information, including concrete steps that may help you wipe out some of your debt.

If you have a lot of debt, bankruptcy may be an option. In 2022, more than 380,000 Americans chose bankruptcy. While the process may damage your credit, making it harder to get good offers from credit card companies and lenders, it's also a way to make a financial re-start.

You should also note that the bankruptcy process will likely require the services of a bankruptcy attorney.

Prioritizing What You Pay

Another step is prioritizing what debt you should pay first. If you can't pay off your debt monthly, you may want to prioritize the debt that's hitting you with the most financial pain.

Continued on next page…

The Full moon in November is traditionally called the Beaver Moon

The tradition goes back to North America's early colonial years, as it was during this time of year that hunters would set their beaver traps for the last time before the lakes and water sources, they lived in froze over.

https://www.thefactsite.com/november-facts/

HOW TO GET…

Focus on paying things like your home and automobile first, followed by things like utilities and debts that can't be discharged like student loans and unpaid federal taxes. From there, you can focus on unsecured debts like credit cards.

Negotiate
Analyzing your situation and then chatting with your credit card companies may be helpful. Some companies offer temporary hardship programs that lower interest rates for a short period of time, which dedicates more of your monthly payment to your principal.

One warning here you should be aware of: If you reach out to your credit card companies to discuss your struggles paying what you owe, your credit limit may be reduced.

The Avalanche Method
The next step you may want to consider is paying off higher interest rate debt first.

This is called the avalanche method. Let's say you have four credit cards and each of them has significant revolving debt. Using the avalanche method, you'd choose three of those cards and pay their minimums each month.

But with the fourth card — the one with the largest interest rate — you'd prioritize paying as much as possible each month with the goal of paying it off entirely as quickly as you can.

When this card is paid off, you can take that money and dedicate it to the credit card with the next highest interest rate. From there, you simply repeat this method until all four credit cards have a zero balance. income.

Start Small
Conversely, some financial services professionals urge first attacking your credit card with the smallest balance while still paying the minimum on your other cards as a way of quickly eliminating one source of debt.

Once you've eliminated the card with the smallest balance, you can then focus on the card with the next smallest balance.

Balance Transfers
The article next explains that transferring a credit card balance may help you get out of debt a little faster.

As a few hours of TV watching makes clear, a lot of credit card companies offer zero percent interest on balance transfers for a window that's often open for 12 to 18 months, to attract new customers.

But you may be able to use this option to your advantage. For example, you can transfer $5,000 to a card that doesn't charge interest during that initial window and then pay it off before that window closes.

But there are some potential traps. For example, you often only qualify for a credit card with zero percent interest on balance transfers if you have outstanding credit. Additionally, you should consider that there may be a potential balance transfer fee, which is often three to five percent of your balance.

SOURCES
https://money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/debt/slideshows/things-to-do-when-youre-deep-in-debt

HDHP/HSA Pairing May Help Control Medical Costs

If your employer offers health insurance benefits, one of your options may be a high-deductible health plan (HDHP) with eligibility for a health savings account (HSA). These plans offer potential savings by encouraging you to make cost-effective choices in your medical spending. If you do not have employer-sponsored health coverage, you can choose from a variety of individual HDHPs, including plans through state or federal health insurance exchanges.

Lower Premiums, Higher Deductibles
Premiums for HDHP coverage are generally lower than for traditional preferred provider organization (PPO) coverage. In exchange, you pay a larger annual deductible before the plan begins to cover a percentage of expenses.

Certain types of preventive care, such as annual physicals, health screenings, and selected medications, may be covered without a deductible (in some cases, provided at no cost). HDHPs can also offer telehealth and other remote health-care services without a deductible through 2024. Regardless of the deductible, the costs for medical services may be reduced through the insurer's negotiated rate.

To protect consumers from catastrophic expenses, most health insurance plans have an annual out-of-pocket maximum above which the insurer pays all medical expenses. HDHP maximums are generally higher than those of traditional plans. But if you reach the annual maximum, your total cost for that year would typically be lower for an HDHP, with the up-front savings on premiums. If you have low medical costs, the lower premiums also will generally make an HDHP more cost-effective. For other scenarios, the cost-effectiveness of an HDHP may vary with your situation. Although an HDHP might save money over the course of a year, some consumers could be hesitant to obtain appropriate care because of the higher out-of-pocket expense at the time of service.

Triple Tax Advantage
You must be enrolled in an HDHP to establish and contribute to an HSA, which allows investments within the account and offers three powerful tax advantages:(1) contributions are deducted from your adjusted gross income, (2) investment earnings compound tax-free inside the HSA, and (3) withdrawals are tax-free if the money is spent on qualified medical expenses (including dental and vision expenses). Some states do not follow federal tax rules on HSAs.

HSA contributions are typically made through payroll deductions, but in most cases, they can also be made directly to the HSA provider. In 2023, contribution limits are $3,850 for an individual and $7,750 for a family ($4,150/$8,300 in 2024), plus an additional $1,000 if the account holder is age 55 or older.

Although 2023 payroll contributions must be made by December 31, you can make direct contributions for 2023 up to the April 2024 tax deadline. Some employers contribute to an employee's HSA, and any employer contributions would be considered in the annual contribution limit.

Growing Trend
Percentage of covered workers enrolled in an HSA-eligible high-deductible health plan.

Saving for the Long Run
Many people use HSAs to pay health-care expenses as they go, but there are advantages to paying from other funds and allowing the HSA to accumulate and pursue tax-deferred growth over time. Assets in an HSA belong to the contributor, so they can be retained in the account or rolled over to a new HSA if you change employers or retire. Unspent HSA balances can be used to help meet health-care needs in future years whether or not you are enrolled in an HDHP; however, you must be enrolled in an HDHP to contribute to an HSA.

Although HSA funds cannot be used to pay regular health insurance premiums, they can be used to pay Medicare premiums and long-term care costs, which could make an HSA an excellent vehicle to help fund retirement expenses. After you enroll in Medicare, you can no longer contribute to an HSA (because Medicare is not an HDHP), but you can continue to use the HSA funds tax-free for qualified expenses. After age 65, you can withdraw HSA funds for any purpose without paying the 20% penalty that typically applies to those under age 65, but you would pay ordinary income taxes, similar to a withdrawal from a traditional IRA.

All investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal, and there is no guarantee that any investment strategy will be successful.