



Solve M.E.

Solve M.E. Patient and Caregiver Resource Guide: ME/CFS and your Finances

Contact All Creditors, and Explain Your Situation

If you have been diagnosed with ME/CFS, or any chronic illness, you may be struggling or unable to work. Monetary disruption can lead to extreme stress levels, particularly if you are ill; and even more stressful if you are the sole financial support for your household.

Your first task is taking an inventory of all your monthly bills, plus all of your outstanding debt. It is of vital importance to deal with your creditors *proactively*. It is the *only* way to deal with the financial crisis that unfortunately, many times accompanies this devastating illness.

Phone them, *before* they phone you. Attempt to use the same contact person for ongoing, multiple calls. You should strive to build a relationship and trust with the holder of your credit.

Do not make promises you know you can't keep. Pay \$1 or \$5 per month to your medical providers if that is all you can. Establish that you are paying what you can. Do not add more to your credit cards, as you will be pressured even by medical professionals to transfer your debt from their office to higher credit card debt. The brutal truth is more difficult to disclose, but failing to keep a financial promise at this point can be devastating.

Make a list of all your creditors and all your resources, including your bank accounts and income sources. Have a best friend or close relative sit down with you to help. This friend is your “financial advocate.” Request your financial advocate to contact each company. (You will need to be in close proximity if you use a financial advocate, to verify authority for your financial advocate to speak for you.)

Ask your advocate to inquire about disability insurance forms and procedures for temporarily stopping payments. If disability insurance is not covered on your credit cards or car loans, have your advocate request a loan restructure. Most companies are willing to reduce payments if you have a good credit history with them. Student Loan payments can be temporarily stopped with a physician’s statement as long as you are under the care of a doctor for a recognized disability by the court.

Important Facts for Your Financial Advocate to Follow:

1. Make a list of every creditor, medical and non-medical with contact phone numbers, amounts owed, dates of last payment, and proposed repayment schedules.
2. Call each creditor on the list. If you are representing yourself with these contacts, skip to #3. If you have acquired a financial advocate to help, introduce your advocate. Inform your creditor of your illness and your limited energy to interact with them. Announce that you will be on speaker phone during the entire contact period; then move on to #3.
3. Call each creditor on the list - record name of company, date, exact time, contact person’s name (always ask how to spell name), why you are calling, and their response - as much in “quotes” as possible.
4. Attempt to contact the same person each time. If not possible, or even if

it is the same person, go back to #2 at the beginning of each call. Tell them the date of your previous call, exact time and why you called, and their previous response. Then tell them why you are calling again. Then again follow the same procedure: Record name of company, date, exact time, contact person's name, why you called, and their response.

5. Either have a journal dedicated to your calls, use a spreadsheet, or record information on each bill. Keep bills organized in a folder. You may also use the Financial Contact Log, provided below. Use a separate page for each creditor.
6. If you or (your advocate) are not getting the assistance you need from the contact person, if the contact person is rude, or if the financial situation continues to be unsettled, you (or your advocate) should ask to speak to their supervisor. Repeat all of your previous calls with each contact person, giving dates, exact times, and quotes from the contact. You (or your advocate) will be taken more seriously by the supervisor if contacts are documented.
7. If during or following a telephone call, the contact person follows through with a promised action, remember to document their name to use as a future contact person.

Financial Contact Log

Name of Creditor	Date	Time	Contact Person's Name	Why are you Calling?	Response