

# Financial Checkup Six Smart Money Moves

by Ellie Kay

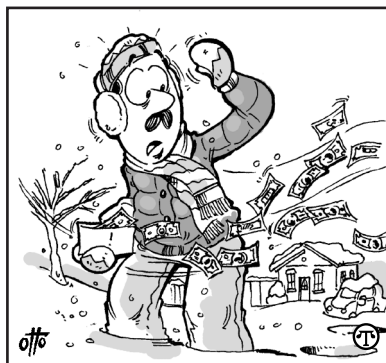
*America's Family Financial Expert* (NAPSA)—The beginning of the year is a great time to follow six smart money moves that should be a part of your annual financial checkup:

**1. An Emergency Savings Account**—This is not an investment account; its purpose is not growth, but safety. These funds would be accessed in the event of unemployment, emergency home repairs, or unexpected bills and can be built with automatic monthly savings fund transfers from your paycheck. It's good to have a minimum of three month's worth of living expenses in this account.

**2. Health Insurance**—Double your insurance dollars by using a new program approved in January of 2004 by Congress—Health Savings Accounts, or HSAs. This is like an IRA for health care. You can use the tax-free money needed for health care services and products not covered by your health insurance plan today and save the remainder in an interest-bearing account for tomorrow.

At [www.eHealthInsurance.com](http://www.eHealthInsurance.com) you'll find HSA-eligible plans available immediately and anonymously, or get help from their no-pressure customer care representatives by phone. The two main benefits to remember about HSAs are: a) they make coverage more accessible and affordable and, b) they give consumers greater control over money spent on health-related expenses.

**3. A Retirement Account**—Take advantage of terrific tax-deferred accounts offered by your employer, including 401(k) and 403(b) plans. Keep in mind that Health Savings Accounts are in addition to traditional retirement



plans so max out tax advantages by implementing both of these plans.

**4. A Good Credit Rating**—Three quick and simple ways to improve credit ratings include: a) pay bills a day early rather than a day late, b) pay \$5 to \$10 above the minimum payment, and c) never carry more than 50 percent of your total credit line on any given card.

**5. A College Fund**—Select a college savings account that has low fees, a good selection of investments, plus a tax break. One of the best buys is a Qualified State Tuition Plan, also called 529 Plans. Go to [www.savingforcollege.com](http://www.savingforcollege.com) to research the right tax-deferred or tax-deductible plan for you.

**6. An Internet Connection**—Here's an easy one. As simple as it may sound, Internet access is a good financial move because it allows you to study any financial topic with a few clicks. This helps with everything from researching health insurance rates at [www.eHealthinsurance.com](http://www.eHealthinsurance.com) to locating money-savings links at [www.elliekay.com](http://www.elliekay.com).

• *Ellie Kay is the best-selling author of eight books, a frequent guest on CNBC and CNN and a national radio commentator with "Money Matters."*