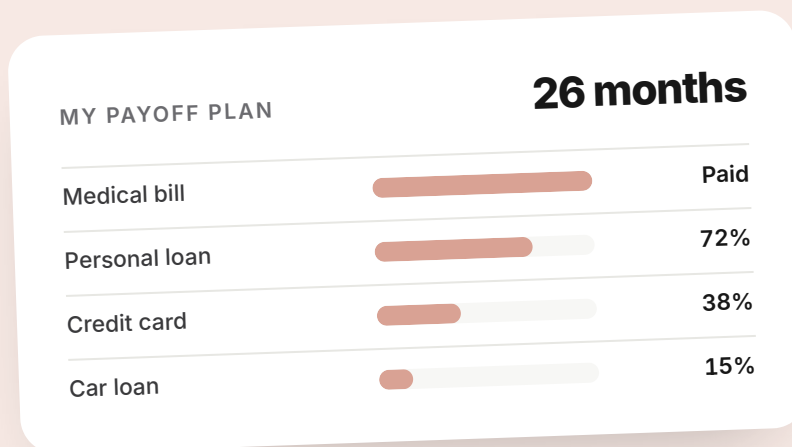


FREE GUIDE • DEBT PAYOFF

The Debt-Free Roadmap

A calm, step-by-step plan to pay off what you owe, with a real example, a worksheet and a checklist you can print.



- 1 Why your balance barely moves (and how to fix it)
- 2 Snowball vs avalanche, with real numbers
- 3 Your 7-step plan, worksheet and checklist

BEFORE WE START

You're not bad with money. Debt is just slow by design.

If you've been paying every month and the balance hardly changes, it isn't because you're doing it wrong. It's because most of your payment never touches the debt. It goes to interest first.

\$1.26T

owed on credit cards in the US. You are far from alone.

New York Fed, Q2 2026

22.36%

average interest rate on credit cards that charge interest.

Federal Reserve, Aug 2026

69%

of Americans say money uncertainty has made them feel anxious or depressed.

Northwestern Mutual, 2025

Where your payment really goes

Take a \$4,800 credit card at 24.9% with a \$120 minimum payment. In the first month, about **\$100 of that \$120 is interest**. Only around \$20 actually reduces what you owe. Pay the minimum every month and it takes years to clear, because the interest keeps eating most of each payment.

The good news: that works in reverse too. Every extra dollar you pay goes straight to the balance, which means less interest next month, which means more of your next payment hits the debt.

That's the whole engine of this guide.

What you'll have by the end

A full list of what you owe, the order to pay it in, the monthly amount that gets you there, and a rough debt-free date. No apps, no judgment, just a plan you can see.

STEPS 1 TO 3

See the whole picture first

Most people carry their debt around as a vague, heavy feeling. Writing it down is uncomfortable for about ten minutes, and then it's a relief: a number you can see is a number you can beat.

1 List every debt

Credit cards, store cards, car loan, personal loans, medical bills, buy-now-pay-later, money owed to family. For each one write the **balance**, the **interest rate** (APR) and the **minimum payment**. Your latest statement or the lender's app has all three.

2 Add up your minimums

This is the amount you must pay every month just to stay current. It's your starting point, not your plan.

3 Find your "extra"

Look at your budget and pick one amount you can add on top of the minimums every month, even if it's \$25. Choose a number you can keep up for months, not one that only works in a great month. Consistency beats size.

Our example: four debts, \$14,100 in total

DEBT	BALANCE	INTEREST RATE	MINIMUM
Medical bill	\$900	0%	\$50
Personal loan	\$2,400	11%	\$90
Credit card	\$4,800	24.9%	\$120
Car loan	\$6,000	7%	\$180
Total	\$14,100		\$440

We'll use these four debts through the rest of the guide, with an extra **\$200 a month** on top of the minimums (\$640 in total).

STEP 4

Choose your method: snowball or avalanche

Both methods work the same way: pay the minimum on everything, then throw all your extra at **one** "focus" debt. When it's gone, move to the next. The only difference is the order.

Snowball

Pay the **smallest balance** first.

You clear whole debts quickly, and every cleared debt is proof the plan works. Best if motivation is your weak spot.

Avalanche

Pay the **highest interest rate** first.

You pay the least interest overall. Best if you're steady and motivated by saving money.

Our example, three ways

PLAN	FIRST DEBT GONE	DEBT - FREE IN	TOTAL INTEREST
Minimums only, no plan	Month 18	87 months	\$6,610
Snowball (+\$200/month)	Month 4	26 months	\$2,343
Avalanche (+\$200/month)	Month 18	26 months	\$1,912

Calculated month by month with interest charged monthly and fixed minimum payments. Real card minimums often shrink as the balance falls, which makes "minimums only" take even longer.

Look at the gap between the first row and the other two. **Having a plan matters far more than which plan you pick.** Both methods finish more than five years sooner and save over \$4,000. Avalanche saves another \$431. Snowball gives you a win in month 4 instead of month 18.

What the research says

Researchers at Northwestern's Kellogg School studied about 6,000 people paying off credit card debt. Those who cleared small balances first were more likely to eliminate their debt completely, even though it wasn't the cheapest order on paper. Small wins keep people going.

STEPS 5 TO 7

Make it run on its own

5 Automate the minimums

Set up automatic minimum payments on every debt so nothing is ever late. Late fees and penalty rates can undo months of progress. Then pay your extra to the focus debt on payday, before the money gets spent elsewhere.

6 Roll every payment forward

This is the step that makes the plan speed up. When a debt hits zero, don't keep its payment. Add it to the next debt. In our snowball example the medical bill is gone in month 4, so its \$50 plus your \$200 extra now go to the personal loan: \$340 a month instead of \$90. Each cleared debt makes the next one fall faster.

7 Check in once a month

Pick one date (the day after payday works well). Update each balance, tick off what you paid, and look at how far you've come. Fifteen minutes. Seeing the numbers drop is what keeps you going when it feels slow.

Ways to find a little more "extra"

- **Cancel one unused subscription** and send that amount to your focus debt. (Our free Money Leak Audit guide walks you through it.)
- **Send windfalls straight to the focus debt:** tax refunds, bonuses, gifts, money from selling things you don't use.
- **Ask for a lower rate.** A short call to your card company asking for a lower APR sometimes works, especially if you've paid on time.
- **Look at a 0% balance transfer carefully.** It can pause interest for a while, but check the transfer fee and the rate when the offer ends, and don't add new spending to the card.

Keep a small cushion

Before going all-in, many people keep a small emergency buffer so a surprise car repair doesn't land back on a credit card. Even a few hundred dollars helps. (Our free Safety Net Starter guide shows how to build one alongside your debt plan.)

AVOID THESE

6 mistakes that keep people in debt longer

-  **Spreading the extra across every debt**
Paying a little extra on everything feels fair, but it clears nothing quickly. Focus all of it on one debt at a time.
-  **Keeping the payment when a debt is paid off**
The freed-up payment quietly turns into spending. Roll it into the next debt the same week.
-  **Picking an extra amount you can't keep up**
A huge number for two months, then nothing, loses to a small number every month. Start small and raise it later.
-  **Still using the cards you're paying off**
If the balance grows while you pay it, the plan can't work. Take the cards out of your wallet and your online shops while you pay them down.
-  **Having no buffer at all**
One surprise bill goes on the card and it feels like you're back at the start. A small cushion protects your progress.
-  **Tracking it in your head**
If you can't see your progress, you can't feel it. Write it down, every month.

YOUR WORKSHEET

My debt list

Print this page or copy it into a notebook. Fill in every debt, then number them in the order you'll pay them: smallest balance first (snowball) or highest rate first (avalanche).

ORDER	DEBT	BALANCE	RATE	MINIMUM

My total minimum payments each month: _____

My extra each month (on top of minimums): _____

My method (snowball or avalanche): _____

My first focus debt: _____

My monthly check-in date: _____

PRINT ME

Your debt-free checklist

THIS WEEK

☐

List every debt with its balance, rate and minimum

Use the worksheet on the previous page.

☐

Add up your total minimums

☐

Choose your monthly extra

An amount you can keep up for months.

☐

Pick snowball or avalanche, and number your debts

☐

Turn on automatic minimum payments for every debt

☐

Take the cards you're paying off out of your wallet and saved shop logins

EVERY MONTH

☐

Pay your extra to the focus debt on payday

☐

Update every balance on your check-in date

☐

Send any windfall to the focus debt

EVERY TIME A DEBT HITS ZERO

☐

Roll its whole payment into the next debt

☐

Cross it off, and actually celebrate (something small and free counts)

NEXT STEP

Doing this on paper works. It's also where most people give up.

Recalculating balances, rolling payments over and working out a new debt-free date every month is tedious. That tedious part is exactly what we're building our Debt Payoff planner to do for you.

- ✓ Works out your payoff order for snowball or avalanche, automatically
- ✓ Rolls payments forward the moment a debt is cleared
- ✓ Shows your debt-free date and the interest you're saving
- ✓ Progress bars that fill as your balances fall

Try the free Debt Payoff Calculator

You're on our list, so you'll be the first to know when the full planner launches.

Sources

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This guide is general information to help you plan, not financial advice. Everyone's situation is different. For advice about your own debts, talk to a qualified professional or a non-profit credit counselor. © EasyReadySheets. Free to use and print for yourself; please don't resell or republish it.