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## Easy Financial Tips for Soon-to-Be College Students

If I could give you one piece of advice as you start managing your money for college, it would be this: Know how much money you have. I know, it's seems ridiculously simple, but you'd be surprised how challenging it can be.

If you're like most college students, you'll come to campus with a checking account, a debit card, possibly a checkbook, and maybe even an overdraft line of credit (Don't know what that is? Don't worry, we'll get to that in a minute).

Your challenge, then, is to keep track of what goes in and what comes out... every deposit from home, every paycheck, each check and electronic transfer, plus all those debit card transactions.

But there's one tool that can simplify all that, and it's probably in your hand right now. Your cell phone is all you need to keep up with all the details that threaten to transform your checking account into chaos:

- **Download your bank's mobile banking app.** They're all free, and all fairly simple to use. You can see each transaction – usually in real-time – and see your available balance any time.
- **Use mobile deposit capture.** This feature, available in most banks' mobile apps, lets you take a picture of a check to make a deposit. The processing time is usually the same as an in-person deposit, but you don't have to hassle yourself with going to the bank.
- **Set alerts.** Many banks give you the ability to set alerts to keep you from overdrawing your account. For example, you can set your app to text you if your balance goes below \$50 or any other dollar amount you choose. You can also be notified if an automatic payment is coming out soon or if an automatic deposit is scheduled to go in.
- **Protect against fraud.** Using the same alerts, you can flag transactions above your normal spending habits – say, anything over \$500 – so you can review each one as they come through. That way, if it's not you spending the money, you can notify your bank right away.

Many mobile banking apps also allow you to manage your debit card, meaning you can literally pause or permanently disable your card if you accidentally leave it behind at a restaurant or think it's been stolen. And if you have a joint account with one or both of your parents, they can easily transfer funds into your account almost instantly... how convenient is that?

Services that protect you against overdrafts can also prove extremely valuable, considering some banks charge upwards of \$40 if you overdraw your account. Here are a few ways you can avoid this dreaded aspect of "adulting":

- **Overdraft coverage.** Typically banks will offer you two options here. First, you can arrange to have the bank automatically move money from a second account – usually a savings account – if your checking account is close to zero balance. The second option is a line of credit that "loans" you money when your balance is low. This option will require credit approval, so you may need to involve a parent to add this option.

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- Alerts, alerts, alerts. Again, these are the simplest way to avoid overdrawing your account, and they're free for you to use. Set those low balance alerts so you'll know to either add money or stop spending—or both.

The college years are a great time to get used to budgeting, spending smart, protecting your money, and generally understanding money management. It's a chance to make mistakes without the larger risk of the "real world." By taking an active role in managing your own finances now, you can build your confidence and be prepared when it's time to go out on your own.