



Ways to Save Money

The best way to save money is to become organized. If you're not organized it's easy to forget things. By setting up a monthly budget, and keeping track of when bills are due, you can keep yourself from wasting money. Start by looking at your largest bills and expenses and work your way down to some of the smaller ones.

It's important to know what bills and expenses are “needs” and which ones are “wants.” You should always make sure you have money for your “needs” before you spend money on “wants”. Think twice before you purchase anything, and make sure that it is something that you will get a lot of use out of.

Whenever you're purchasing larger items make sure that you shop around for the best price. Also be mindful that you're purchasing a quality item. Nothing is more wasteful than having an expensive item break prematurely.

There are many computer programs you can use to help set up a budget, and they can even provide you with graphs to keep track of where most of your money is spent. Even using a simple ledger, planner, or just a book of graph paper can help you organize your finances and collect all the information in one spot.

Utilities

Lower your water heater – Set your water heater at a lower temperature. Water heaters are often set higher than is necessary or comfortable. By setting it lower it can decrease the energy consumption.

Turning down your heat / air conditioning – An easy way to keep your electric and gas bill lower is to use less heat and/or air conditioning. Whenever you leave your house or apartment for a relatively long period turn down your heat or AC. By making a habit of this you can trim some money off your bill.

Open your windows – On nice days, open your windows to get some fresh air into your house and/or for a nice breeze. Opening all of the windows in your house or apartment is an easy and cheap way to cool it off.

Turn off electronics – Turn off lights, computers, TVs, etc. when they're not being used.

Unplug charging cords – Cords for cell phones, laptops, and other electronics can have a residual drain on your electricity. Unplug the cords when you're not charging those items.

Regulate your rooms – In the summer keep blinds and curtains closed, the darker your rooms are the less hot they will be. In the winter keep blinds and curtains open to let in the sun and help your rooms stay warm.

Wash clothes in cold water – Washing clothes in cold water will conserve some energy.

Fireplace – In the winter a fireplace can help keep your home warm. However, a fireplace still has its own costs (firewood, kindling, and chimney cleaning costs). Another drawback is that a fireplace only keeps the area around it warm.

Housing

Living modestly – Instead of living in a large house or apartment, think about the space you actually need. By living in a less extravagant place, you can save money for a “dream house” later. Think about how long you want to live in the location, and what things you actually need for your housing during that period.

Refinance your mortgage – Refinance your mortgage to get a lower rate. By switching to a longer mortgage, your monthly payments will be decreased. However, a longer mortgage will mean that you're spending more money on interest, it's just spread out over a longer period.

Haggle – If you plan on living in the same place for a long time, see if your landlord will lower the rent or offer discounts. Often landlords will offer discounts if you sign the lease for a long period, or pay for a few months at once. DO NOT sign a lease if you don't plan on staying there for the whole duration. Breaking a lease early will cost you money.

Roommates – Whether you're living in an apartment or a house, roommates can help you save some money. Make sure you have checked up on potential roommates before they move in, a disruptive roommate may save you money, but cause you unnecessary stress. Also, be aware that apartments and even houses have limits to how many people can live in the location.

Security Deposit – Make sure you spend time cleaning and fixing small damages around your apartment when you move out. Many things can easily be fixed (dents in walls, stains on carpets, dirty bathrooms, etc.) and you can do it yourself a lot cheaper than what your landlord will take out of your security deposit.

Moving – Call in all of your favors from your friends. Having friends and family help you move will help you save money, and make less trips. By making more trips in your own vehicle, you can save money by not using a truck rental. For larger items see if you can take them apart to fit into a smaller vehicle, or find a friend with a truck.

Do-it-yourself – Many problems around your house you can easily fix yourself. Before you call a plumber, electrician, or contractor do some research online to see if you can fix the problem on your own. If not you may know someone who can do it for you.

Food

People tend to eat more food than is necessary. Cutting down on how much food you eat is an easy way to save money. Eat more frequently throughout the day or have small snacks between meals to keep yourself satisfied, not stuffed.

Be careful while grocery shopping. Food products have a multitude of prices and quality, so it is important to make sure that you get the best taste for the price. Cheap food does not save you money when you don't eat it.

Raid the fridge – Before you rush off to the grocery store, make sure that you don't have items getting old in your refrigerator. You might have enough food tucked away in the back of your fridge and freezer to make a whole meal. This will also keep you from buying stuff that you already have.

Buy store brands – For many items, the store brands are almost indiscernible from the major label brands. Store brand items like potatoes, vegetables, fruits, pastas, snack items, etc. taste the same as the major label brands but cost substantially less. The more simple the food product the less difference there is between brands.

Coupons – Cutting out coupons can be time consuming, but it is an easy way to save some money. Keep in mind though, buying stuff you normally would not have bought is hardly saving you money.

Cook at home – Try to cook at home at least a few times a week. By cooking at home you're saving money since you're not going to a restaurant, and you can also cook the food just the way you like it. Cook foods that are simple, buying unique ingredients for a single dish can get costly. Only use spices and ingredients that you know you will use all of.

Leftovers – The more meals you get out of each time you cook, the more money you've saved. The leftovers can also be your lunch for later in the week.

Bag lunch – Instead of eating out while at work or school, bring a lunch.

Going out to eat is one of the bigger drains on your wallet. Here are some ways to make it cheaper.

Take out – Instead of dining in at a restaurant, get the food to go. You'll save money since you're not paying for beverages, and you also don't have to tip (at least not a lot).

Water – Pop and liquor cost a lot at restaurants, water however is free (at most places).

Splitting meals – Many restaurants have large entrees, you can save a lot by splitting a meal.

Cut out the appetizers – Appetizers often cost as much as the meal at restaurants, order a larger meal or try to add little things to the meal (like fries, a salad, soup, shrimp, etc.).

Pass on drinks and dessert – Restaurants mark up drinks and desserts a lot. You'll save money by going to a specialty restaurant (bar, ice cream shop, etc.) after you finish your meal.

Transportation

Leasing a vehicle can end up being more money than it seems when you add together all of the monthly payments. Buying a car is a better option, especially if you plan on using the same car for a long time. You also have the option to sell the car if you want to trade up to a better/newer model. For people that like leasing, try to lease a more economical car, or check with your dealer to figure out which cars currently have deals on their leases.

Plan your drives – Don't drive across town to simply pick up one item. Run errands all at one time, or make stops to and from work, school, etc. to conserve your gas.

Carpool – Drive together with other people whenever possible. Gas is a lot cheaper when split up between a few people.

Public transportation – Check to see if public transportation is a good option for you. Most large cities or those with colleges tend to have effective public transportation. Public transportation not only cuts down on paying for gas, it also keeps you from having to pay for parking.

Short distances – Whenever you need to go short distances think about whether you could get to where you're going by walking or riding a bike. This is a good healthy alternative, especially when the weather is nice.

Cruise control – Especially on long car trips, using cruise control can save you gas money. By going a steady speed less gas is used than when your speed fluctuates.

Proper car care – Take care of your car. By taking good care of your car, you ensure that the car will last longer, retain its value, and hopefully cut down on repair costs.

Clean your car – Having tons of excess junk in your car weighs it down. Less weight in your car means less gas used which means money saved.

Entertainment / Vacations

Just because you're on a budget doesn't mean you can't have fun. There are ways to cut costs and still find ways to entertain yourself.

Cable or satellite TV – By cutting out certain channels or services from your cable or satellite provider you can shave some money off your bill. You can also completely cancel those services to save even more money. Many TV shows and movies can be viewed on the internet for free or for a small fee.

Rentals – Many movies, video games, books, and other sources of entertainment are easily rented. Instead of purchasing something, rent it first, to see if you'll get more than one use out of the item.

Eat before going to the movies or sporting events – Sporting events and movie theaters make the bulk of their money through concessions. Go out to eat before you get to the movie theater or arena so you won't be tempted by overpriced treats.

Party at home – Instead of heading out to a bar or fancy night club for a party, invite some friends over. By having a pot luck or doing BYOB (bring your own beer/drink) you can share the cost with your friends and still have a good selection to choose from.

Free events – Many communities have local events that are free to the public. Check online, at libraries, or with community centers to find free entertainment.

Plan trips on the internet – The internet is a wonderful resource for a planning a trip. Some websites even have full packages for you to choose from. By doing some research you can read reviews of locations and pick from numerous possibilities.

Other forms of travel – When you're taking a trip see which mode of transportation might be the cheapest. The choices range from car, boat, bus, train, and plane. Taking a non-traditional means of travel can be an adventure itself.

Health

Take care of your body. By maintaining a healthy diet and exercise routine, you will live longer and healthier, meaning less trips to the doctor.

Be honest – If you are honest to your doctor about your financial situation, he or she may take actions to make sure you're charged as little as possible. Doctors often receive free products and they may be willing to provide you with free drugs and/or products if they understand you can't afford pricier alternatives.

Haggle – This may seem like an odd idea, but there is some flexibility with your doctor bills. The larger the doctor bill, the more likely the doctor is willing to offer discounts to ensure he or she receives the money. By offering to pay in one payment or in cash, the doctor may be willing to skim some money off the bill.

Be aware – Be aware of all that is being done and told to you. Mistakes sometimes happen, whether it simply involves being overcharged or your health, it's best to know what is going on. By being aware you can prevent mishaps from happening.

Health insurance – Make sure you understand your health insurance policy; what it covers, what it does not cover, and how much you are paying. When you receive bills make sure your insurance has covered what it is supposed to cover.

Buy generics – Generic drugs are exactly the same as their name brand counterparts. When possible, purchase generic drugs instead of major brands; ask your doctor which drugs have generic counterparts, or if there are cheaper alternatives to the drugs you're being prescribed.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are often a necessary evil. Large purchases are nearly impossible unless you have some form of credit. Just because it is important to have credit, it does not mean that you need to rack up a huge balance on your credit card. Try to keep from having a credit card balance that's larger than your checking or saving account balance.

Stick to large purchases – Don't use a credit card for day to day purchases. Many small purchases can easily add up throughout a month. Stick with using cash or a debit card for your daily purchases, otherwise you might find your credit card bill imposing at the end of the month.

Call customer service – You can call your credit card regularly to see if they will lower your APR or increase your credit limit. The card companies regularly evaluate your card, but do not automatically lower your APR or increase your credit, so it is up to you to ask about this.

Avoid balances – Try to pay off your credit cards the same month you use them. The longer a balance is on your credit card, the more money you are being charged for interest.

Use the best card – Keep track of the statistics of your credit cards (annual fee, APR, credit limit, account balance, etc.). Your card with the best statistics should be the one you use the most. A slight difference in APR can lead to wasted money if you are carrying a balance on a card with a higher APR.

Cancel cards – Having a large number of credit cards is not good for your credit. It also makes it harder to keep track of all your money. So before you get a new store credit card, think about whether or not you really need it. Having excess credit cards is not helpful, especially if they have annual fees.

Insurance

Shopping around is an important way to save some money on your insurance. Rates fluctuate all the time, and with so many different companies available, there is some healthy competition. Be wary though, most companies will lure you in with an initial signing bonus; make sure you understand how much of the cheaper price is due to a one-time discount. The best price is the one lowest all the time.

Increasing your deductible – An easy way to save money on insurance is to increase the deductible. A higher deductible means lower monthly payments. Be careful though, if something does happen, you'll have to pay more out of pocket.

Discounts – The various types of insurance often have discounts for certain criteria. It doesn't hurt to ask your representative if there are any discounts that may apply to you. You might also receive a discount if all of your different insurance accounts (auto, house, health, life, etc.) are through the same company. Auto insurance is full of discounts, like safe driver, lower frequency, student driver, lack of accidents, multiple car discount, etc.

General Tips

These general tips offer some further ways to save money.

Buy in bulk – Buying in bulk can help you save money over the long term. The best things to buy in bulk are items that will last a long time, or items that you will definitely use before the expiration date. Buying bulk doesn't save money if you throw away unused product.

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Beauty schools – Hair and makeup can be done at beauty schools for a very discounted price. Don't worry about having a hair tragedy, the students are closely supervised.

Smoking – Smoking can be a very costly habit. By quitting you can save a lot of money. If you'd rather not quit entirely, try cutting down, buying cheaper cigarettes, or roll your own; all of these are cheaper alternatives.

Clothing – Don't buy clothing unless it's necessary. While it's great to have clothing options, having outfits you haven't worn in months is wasting money. Layering is a good way to have different outfits without spending a ton of money on different items.

Hand-me-downs – Swapping clothes with friends and family members is a good way to save money on clothes, especially if you have children.

Secondhand stores – Secondhand stores are great places to find all sorts of things. From electronics to clothes to appliances you can often find nearly new items for very discounted prices. Secondhand stores are also good places to sell some of your own old belongings.

Internet selling – Selling items on the internet is a great way to sell old belongings. On the internet people are looking for all sorts of things, and willing to pay for them. Beware though, use reputable sites and don't send items until all parts of the sale are finalized.

Cut some frivolous spending – going out for certain things can be a big drain on your budget. Buying little things like drinks, coffee, snacks, treats, magazines, etc. can really add up in the long run. If you want to splurge on little snacks and drinks during the day, bring them from home.

Keep receipts – Without receipts it is very hard to return items. In the event an item breaks or just doesn't work adequately, the receipt will help you get your money back. Also with the receipt you can validate your purchase date in case you need to utilize the manufacturer's warranty. Manufacturer warranties last longer than the return periods at stores, and often let you replace broken goods (often electronics) for free or a small fee.

Home phone or cell phone – By cutting out unnecessary services you can save money on your home or cell phone bill. Don't pay for services you don't use regularly. Many people have also stopped using their home phone and use a cell phone as their primary phone.

Bundle services – By combining certain services, like cable or satellite TV, internet service, home phone, and/or cell phone you can save money on your bill. Talk to your providers to see if they offer any bundle discounts.

Bluff – Many memberships and services will give you a discount if you threaten to drop their service or go to a competitor. Be careful though, they may take you up on your bluff.

Dollar stores – Dollar stores can be great places to save some money. Everything from toiletries to food to clothing can be purchased for a dollar. Be careful though, some items actually cost more at the dollar store than you can find them at other stores.

Taxes – When doing your taxes make sure you are receiving as many exemptions as possible. It might be worth having a professional do your taxes at least once, that way you can find out all of the exemptions so that you know about them for future years. There are also many computer programs that assist you with doing your taxes, that are constantly updated, and cheaper than going to a professional.



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Library – The library is a treasure trove of saving money. Many libraries now loan out movies and even video games in addition to books. Libraries also have computers with internet access, along with classes to help you learn about all sorts of different things.

Use what you pay for – Think of any memberships you have or items that you own; if you're not using them, you're wasting money. Cancel memberships you don't use frequently and sell items you no longer use. Garage sales can be a great way to get some extra money.

Build your savings – Try to save a little money each month. Even a few cents a month can add up to help you prepare for emergencies or save up for a vacation later.