

Curb Your Runaway Expenses and Still Have Fun

In the ever-changing game of life, expenses are a constant. For most of us, the prices of everyday goods and services seem to have risen faster than our income. In some cases, it may be more than just costs that have risen; it may be that our *consumption* has grown, as well. If you are looking for ways to reduce your expenses and curb consumption while still having fun, consider the following suggestions:

Saving Begins at Home

If you are in the market for a new home, shop around for the best rates available for your mortgage and any equity loans. Also, make sure you are deducting what is allowable under current Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rules.

Review your home heating and utility consumption for the last 12–24 months (or as long as you have owned or rented the property). Check to see if your utility companies offer a budget plan that divides your annual energy costs into equal payments to help equalize your monthly bill amounts throughout the year. Remember during winter months to take another degree off the thermostat to help save on your heating bill.

Contact your local electric and water departments for free conservation programs and tips. Expect their rates to continue rising, and adjust your lifestyle accordingly. When using air conditioning, remember to adjust the thermostat.

Cable and phone service providers have competitive bundled packages for customers that include a flat rate for voice, Internet, and cable TV services. Review your separate cable, phone, or Internet bills periodically to see if you can save money by combining your services.

Shopping By the Numbers

Going to the grocery store? Make a shopping list ahead of time to avoid impulse buying, get a store card for specials, clip coupons, and grab a supermarket circular for weekly deals. These efforts may reduce your weekly food bill by up to 20%. Also, consider joining a warehouse club and buying in bulk.

Clothing prices may seem sky high, but you have the power to bring them down to earth. By learning to shop for quality at retail outlets, waiting for end-of-season sales, and venturing out to explore upscale consignment shops, you can avoid paying designer clothing and accessory prices.

Overall Fitness

A regular fitness program can lead to better health and fewer visits to the doctor or chiropractor. Talk to your health care provider about inexpensive ways to incorporate physical activity into your daily routine, such as walking, without having to pay for a fitness center membership. In addition, if your health care provider agrees, choose generic medications over brand names, and look for pharmacies that offer discounted rates.

Alternatives to Screen Time

Assess your TV-watching habit to see if all those “must-have” channels are really necessary. It may be time for fewer channels and more trips to the library.

The cost of an afternoon or evening at the movies is another runaway expense. Enjoy Friday nights at home with the family making pizza and watching DVDs, which you can get for a nominal fee from your local library. Family game nights are another economical option.

Dining out may not always be a luxury. There are times when busy schedules make eating out a necessity. But, there are “two-for-one” specials and “kids eat free” offers at many restaurants for those times when you don’t feel like preparing a meal.

All the hidden expenses like bank fees, online and print subscriptions, hair and nail care, pet care, and lottery tickets, among others can creep up gradually. So, be sure to analyze all these expenses to see which are truly necessary.

Finally, credit cards, with their associated annual fees and finance charges, will sap your savings unless used wisely. High interest, long-term credit card debt is expensive, so develop a plan to transfer balances to cards with a lower rate that extends beyond the introductory period until you are debt free.

We may not be able to control rising prices, but we are not powerless to change our spending habits. If you have fallen prey to runaway spending and increased consumption, you are not alone. Develop a workable budget today to help minimize your monthly expenses, so you can look forward to a more comfortable and secure future.

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