Controlling your daily expenses and adopting a minimalist lifestyle can be an exciting and enlightening endeavor! Consider how spending and owning less could lead you to a more rewarding personal and financial life.

Less Stress

The more we accumulate, the more overwhelmed we may feel. Financial difficulties may ensue if we acquire too many things we don't need.

Try to look around your home or living area. How many needs do you see? You probably have possessions that add joy to your life as well as a few practical items that serve a purpose and make your life easier. However, when you look around, do you also see things that you could do without?

“The fewer possessions you have, the fewer chores and worries you may have,” explained Francine Jay, author of 'The Joy of Less, A Minimalist Living Guide: How to Declutter, Organize, and Simplify Your Life.' “In other words, you have less to clean, maintain, repair, insure, protect and pay for.”

A good way to curb your spending habits might be to consider the consequences of each purchase before you spend your money. Think about whether an item you desire is a want or a need. It might be a good idea to give yourself 24 hours or more to think about whether a purchase is really wise or worth the cost.

More Freedom

Creating a budget should give you an idea of how your income compares with your monthly expenses. Once you take a good look at your spending habits consider what you can cut back on. You may try one of the free budgeting calculators at AARP.org (click on the Money tab and go to Money Tools).

In addition to cutting back on expenditures that could put your budget in danger, Jay suggests in 'The Joy of Less' to also consider what you already own.

“Every extra you purge from your life – be it an unused item, an unnecessary purchase, or an unfulfilling task – feels like a weight lifted from your shoulders,” said Jay, who also blogs about living with less at MissMinimalist.com. “When you’re not weighed down with stuff, or the debt used to pay for it, you’re more flexible, mobile, and able to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.”

More Joy

Once you reflect on your spending habits try to find a way to focus on the joy of enough.

“I believe that true happiness comes from what we do, not what we have,” said Jay. “And the less stuff we have to fuss over, the more time we have for friends, family, community and the wonderful experiences in life.”

Try to envision a financial goal, such as debt resolution, and think about how good you will feel once you obtain financial freedom.

More Money

You might make extra money by selling unwanted possessions at a garage sale, flea market or consignment shop. If you are currently working through a debt settlement program you could deposit that money into your reserve account to get out of debt faster.

Stay on track. Once you have a plan in place to reach your financial goals, it is important to remain focused.

Ideas For A Frugal Lifestyle

- Be A Good Gatekeeper. According to author and minimalist Francine Jay, you should analyze your spending. Examine all of your possessions and purchases, large and small. Try to avoid bringing anything into your home or life that doesn't have a positive, practical impact and isn't budget-friendly.

- Consider Store Brands. ConsumerReports.org revealed that some store brand groceries and their generic counterparts are manufactured by the same company. The only difference might be the packaging and the price!

- Pay With Cash. A recent report by MSN Money showed that shoppers could shave up to 18 percent off their bills when they use cash.

- Utility Savings. AARP suggests shopping around to get the most-cost effective coverage as possible on utilities such as telephones, electricity, gas, water, medications or insurances. You may be able to get adequate service for less than you think.
Handling Creditor Phone Calls And Letters

Your debt negotiation company and consumer advocacy company (UCAN) can be a strong support system that will help you deal with communication from creditors.

Rules On Handling Calls

Rule 1. Keep in mind you do not have to talk with your creditors. You should let your negotiation company handle this for you as much as possible. Many creditors periodically change their settlement polices, so in some instances, your negotiation company may assist you in dealing with particular creditors. In most situations, however, your negotiation company will want to speak with the creditors instead of you speaking with them.

Rule 2. If you end up talking with a creditor, keep the phone call as short as possible. Never provide the creditor with any information about your job, income, where you work, if you are working, when you expect to be able to make a payment, etc.

You may want to say something like, “I can't make any payments now. I just don't have the money. I will be in contact when I think we can work something out.” Try to remember that collecting money is their job. They may say almost anything to get you to make a payment.

Rule 3. Use UCAN throughout the duration of your negotiation program. Consumer advocacy services have been provided for you. If you follow the steps that are presented in your Welcome Packet you will have a strong partner working for you against the creditors. Providing UCAN with important information about the calls you are receiving and using the available tools can make all the difference!

Rule 4. Generally legal matters should be handled in writing. In the event you are subject to a legal threat made during a phone call, you may want to tell the collector (again), “I can't make any payment now. I am having a really tough time financially. I will be in contact when I can do something.” Try to hang up as quickly as possible. Then, follow rule #3.

Letters From Creditors

The initial late letters you may receive are usually polite reminders. As time goes on, however, the tone of the letters may escalate. Eventually, you could begin receiving more threatening letters and notices of possible legal action. Sending UCAN copies of these letters is critical to us helping facilitate action.

Even though most letters are threats you should always send copies of them to your debt negotiation company. In addition, don’t ignore a letter from an attorney, especially from an attorney that is located in your state.

As always, it's important to understand that UCAN is not a law firm, cannot provide you with legal advice and nothing herein should be construed as legal advice. In cases of serious creditor harassment or where legal advice is requested, UCAN refers your case or matter to an attorney licensed to practice law in your state. If you require legal advice, you should speak to an attorney licensed in your state.

Inspiring Thoughts

If you want to be happy, set a goal that commands your thoughts, liberates your energy, and inspires your hopes.

- Andrew Carnegie

Sometimes our financial decisions are influenced more by emotion than logic. The same may be true for the things we possess or the things we feel we need to own to be happy.

Some of us may purchase ‘stuff’ to boost our mood, help us feel like we belong to a certain group or portray a certain image. But in many instances, the more we own, the more complicated our life becomes. Sometimes when we feel more stress in our lives we find ourselves wanting to fill the void by shopping. This vicious circle could lead to more debt and more stress!

What possessions do you own that truly make you feel happy? Is it likely that you have some possessions that add to your life and bring back wonderful memories?

If we use common financial sense and our budget plan allows it, there is nothing wrong with purchasing occasional items that could add to our lives in a positive way.

However, perhaps you own ‘stuff’ that makes you feel negative, weighed down and overwhelmed.

If you are struggling with debt, you may even have possessions that cause you to feel resentment since purchasing them may have added to your difficult financial situation.

Try to think about what really deserves a place in your life. It might be a good idea to consider ways in which you can minimize debt in your life and work toward financial freedom.

Having enough to meet your needs can unlock the chains that might be binding you to a life of worry and debt.

Just think...if you were free of worry and debt, wouldn’t you feel lighter and happier?

Spare Change

Tips To Help You Enjoy A Debt-Free Holiday

It is possible to spend wisely and give thoughtful holiday gifts with these tips from Womansday.com.

Make A Budget List. If you make a list of what you want to buy for each recipient and decide how much you can afford to spend for each item, you could avoid overspending once you get to a busy mall or store.

Cash In. Consider paying in cash for all gifts.

Make Your Own Wrapping Paper
Consider using a roll of plain brown craft paper. Use stickers, rubber stamps, metallic ink or paints to make creative designs. Pretty ribbons or bows can add an extra touch. This idea could work for any gift-giving occasion, eliminating the need for you to purchase different wrapping paper tailored for every event.
Buy Less By Taking Care Of What You Already Own!

Before you purchase wardrobe staples such as ties, shoes, dress shirts or jewelry consider whether or not you can save money by taking care of the accessories you already own.

**Shoes.** According to MSNBC.com, you could help avoid odor and extend the life of men’s or ladies boots by sprinkling a little baking soda in each pair. You may also roll up newspaper and pack it inside your boots to help them keep their shape. Try to store good quality shoes and boots away from a heat source.

It is wise to polish and protect boots and shoes by using a cleaner/protector appropriate for the shoe’s fabric. Organization may also help extend the life of your footwear. Shoe racks that hang on your door or slide under your bed are usually inexpensive and can be found at various discount stores and retailers.

**Clothes.** According to ‘10,001 Ways To Live Large On A Small Budget’ by the writers of WiseBread.com, try to avoid folding clothes that should be hung. Likewise, try not to hang clothes that should be folded. For example, it may be more appropriate to fold sweaters since hanging could force them to stretch out of shape.

Alternately, men’s or women’s dress shirts may not do as well if they are folded.

Keep in mind that the fewer times you have to wash an item of clothing, the longer it will last. Unless a garment is especially dirty, you may not have to wash it after every use. A recent report on the Today Show revealed that blotting the back of your neck with rubbing alcohol could help prevent ring around the collar.

If you are prone to accidents, the writers of WiseBread.com suggest purchasing an inexpensive stain remover pen for quick spot cleans. You can also remove lint and surface fuzz with an inexpensive lint roller.

When doing laundry, consider washing jeans and t-shirts inside out to preserve color and try to separate darks and whites before washing. If you own clothing with hooks or zippers, make sure they are zipped or fastened before you throw them in the wash to avoid snags or tears.

Try to wash clothing in cold water as often as possible and consider hang-drying or removing clothing from the dryer when almost dry.

**Small Accessories.** MSNBC.com suggests being creative when it comes to storage solutions.

Men might want to consider weaving ties through the slats of a rack, ladder or trellis for storage and display. Keep in mind that shoe organizers can also work as storage options for items such as ties or belts.

For the ladies, ice cube trays or even plastic egg containers may be used to contain rings and small earrings. Or perhaps a candlestick holder could also be used to display and organize your bracelets.

Containers can be made from unexpected objects. These simple storage solutions can help protect your possessions and add years to their life.

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**Presidential Money Quotes: Test Your Knowledge**

Many of us worry about money and making ends meet. American presidents are no different. Take the quick test below to see if you can match the money quote to the United States president who actually said it. (Courtesy of CreditCards.com.)

1. “Never spend money before you have it.”
   - A. Thomas Jefferson
   - B. James Polk
   - A. Gerald R. Ford
   - B. Jimmy Carter

2. “Wealth can only be accumulated by the earnings of industry and the savings of frugality.”
   - A. John Adams
   - B. John Tyler
   - C. Zachary Taylor
   - D. Ulysses S. Grant

3. “Our present financial condition is without a parallel in history. No nation has ever before been embarrassed from too large a surplus in its treasury.”
   - A. James Monroe
   - B. James Buchanan
   - C. George W. Bush
   - D. John F. Kennedy

4. “If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”
   - A. Andrew Jackson
   - B. Barack Obama
   - C. John F. Kennedy
   - D. Lyndon B. Johnson

5. “The circulation of confidence is better than the circulation of money.”
   - A. George Washington
   - B. James Madison
   - C. Bill Clinton
   - D. Ronald Reagan

Can Buying Store Brands Help You Save More Money?

According to Investopedia.com, the average consumer can save anywhere from $200-$1,500 per year by purchasing generic products. If you haven’t tried them before, consider giving generic or store brands a chance. Here are a few to start out with.

**Cereal**

According to Yahoo Finance, many shoppers try generic cereals and discover that they taste the same but are much less expensive than their brand name rivals. For example, a 14-ounce box of corn flakes by one of the popular brand name makers can cost up to $2.99, while some store or generic brands may be priced around 99 cents.

**Prescription Drugs**

If you do a price comparison, you might see that generic versions of prescription drugs could cost between 20 to 80 percent less than their brand name counterparts. Some consumers may worry that generic prescriptions are not as safe as name brand drugs. However, according to Mint.com, pharmaceutical companies are required to use the same active ingredients in generic drugs as the brand name version and the same quality and safety standards apply to generic prescriptions. You should discuss with your physician generic alternatives to any medications you may be taking.

**Over-The-Counter (OTC) Meds**

Generic versions of popular name brand OTC meds might contain the same active ingredients. And, just as with their brand-name equivalents, generic OTC meds must be approved by drug regulators. Allow time on your next shopping trip to compare ingredients on any medication you may be considering. You should also discuss options with your pharmacist.

**Basic Baking Products**

Whether you need flour, butter or spices, generic baking staples should be comparable to popular brands with one difference - a much smaller price tag. According to Investopedia.com, the companies that produce generic single-ingredient items are required to follow the same production and storage regulations as the companies that manufacture brand name products.

**Fresh Fruits And Veggies**

Consider locally-grown fruits and vegetables. You may see popular labels you recognize in your local supermarket but label-free produce may be fresher and could benefit your health and help local farmers.

**Household Items**

When it comes to household items, such as plastic wrap, foil, bleach, household cleaners or garbage bags, some brand names may work better, however you may want to ask yourself if a less expensive product would adequately meet your needs.

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