

Identity Theft - The Best Defense is a Good Offense

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) estimates that as many as 9 million Americans have their identities stolen each year. This is a serious crime that affects people of any age. Identity theft can occur in many ways. Your personal information can be stolen from trash bins, the Internet, your home or place of business. According to the FTC, identity theft has been the top consumer complaint for the past five years in a row.

The good news is there are measures that you can take now to protect yourself. Springboard recommends that you take the following actions:

- (1) Obtain a free copy of your credit report. According to the FTC, 39 percent of victims discovered that their identity was stolen more than seven months after it first occurred.
- (2) Make a photocopy of everything in your wallet. Do not carry the information with you. Store it in a secure location.
- (3) Keep on hand the three credit reporting bureaus telephone numbers.

Equifax: 1-800-525-6285; www.equifax.com

Experian: 1-888-EXPERIAN (397-3742); www.experian.com

TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289; www.transunion.com

If you have your wallet or personal information lost or stolen you will have a duplicate copy of your records to contact those companies. Additionally, you may immediately call any one of the bureaus above to place a fraud alert on your credit file. The credit bureau you contact is required to alert the other two credit reporting agencies. This prompt action will place a 90 day fraud alert on your credit report, which may help prevent an identity thief from opening accounts in your name. If you need to extend the fraud alert longer or require a credit freeze please contact the bureaus directly for more information.

Todd Emerson, President and Chief Executive Officer

You can contact SPRINGBOARD[®] by mail, phone, fax or email; we are always here to help.

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From the Editor's Desk: FADD?

by Gary Foreman, editor

If you Google "attention deficit disorder" you'll get 3,150,000 returns. It was about 1980 when doctors first started talking about it. Move forward to today and you'll hear the phrase frequently. Not only in relation to children, but also to adults. There are a variety of similar disorders and ways to describe it: ADHD, A.D.D., ADD/ADHD, ADD-ADHD.

It's time for a new designation: FADD. It will stand for Financial Attention Deficit Disorder.

There are a variety of symptoms. An inability to see the financial consequences of a decision. The need for immediate gratification regardless of cost. The desire for an immediate solution to a financial problem.

Many people are unable to see the financial consequences of their decisions. You can

see FADD at work at malls and other places where people shop. Many who suffer with FADD spend entire days at the mall shopping. Acute sufferers sometimes take purchases out to their car in the parking lot and return for more shopping. When challenged as to how they'll pay for their shopping sprees, they can become dangerous. Be cautious approaching someone displaying this type of FADD behavior. They've been known to ridicule the financial status of people who don't share their urge to shop.

Another similar FADD behavior is the person who is compelled to make a purchase now without thinking of the costs. Any time that you hear someone convincing themselves that they can afford the payments, you're probably dealing with a case of Immediate FADD (or IFADD). It's unfortunate, but salespeople encourage IFADD behavior. Some IFADD victims are able to limit themselves to buying knives and costume jewelry on the shopping channel or internet. But IFADD is progressive. Most commonly they'll progress to electronics/appliances, then automobiles/boats/recreational vehicles and finally to overly large homes.

It's unusual for a FADD victim to recognize that they have a problem. Usually it's up to a friend, loved one or financial advisor. If you see someone you love exhibiting FADD, approach them cautiously. While not prone to violence, they have been known to terminate long-standing relationships when confronted with their FADD symptoms.

Counseling provides the best opportunity to recognize the condition and embark on a course to reduce or eliminate FADD symptoms. Many patients report that by studying their habits and seeking alternative behaviors they can lead a productive life. Most often, these patients demonstrate no propensity to return to FADD behavior.

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You don't have a choice. You must heat your home.

Saving on Your Heating Bill

by Justin Ripley

With gas, heating fuel, and electric prices rising more and more every day, many people are finding that the cost of heating their homes is reaching astronomical proportions. Unlike other monthly expenses that can be cut out of a person's budget, home heating expenses are not an area where we have much choice. We have to heat our homes during the cold winter months just in order to survive. It's as simple as that.

Despite the fact that this is an expense we cannot remove from our budgets, there are a number of things that can be done to trim those heating costs throughout the winter. Many articles point to expensive remedies, such as installing energy efficient windows or installing new insulation. While these solutions work, it can take years to realize the savings in lower heating costs. Conversely, most of these ten tips are cheap, easy, and quick to implement. I hope they will save you some money while keeping you warm throughout those cold winter months!

~ **Install a "smart" thermostat.** While it may cost you somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100 to purchase a programmable thermostat, it should pay for itself within a year. Personally, I bought a 7-day programmable thermostat as soon as I moved into my new house and I love it. It was relatively easy to install myself and now the temperature in my home fluctuates throughout the day per my plan. The heat drops down to 62 during the day when I'm not home (why keep the place warm when nobody is home!) then charges back up to 70 degrees shortly before I get back from work. At bedtime, it drops down to 62 again, and then it heads back up to 70 shortly before I need to get out of bed in the morning. It's great!

~ **Throw some extra blankets on the bed.** Following the thought from above, I sleep in a relatively cold

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Heating Bill cont...

environment. I find it to be better for my lungs, and frankly, once you're nestled under a bunch of warm blankets, it's quite enjoyable. Not heating the house to 70 degrees throughout the night will save a bunch of money on those heating bills.

- ~ **Consider buying a humidifier.** Moist air feels warmer than dry air, and it's better for your skin and lungs, too.
- ~ **Wear wool socks in the house.** The floors in your house get cold in the winter as heat rises and colder air moves down. Cold feet make cold people. Wool socks are cheap, comfortable, and will keep you and your feet warm.
- ~ **Wear a sweater.** Like the socks, this is a cheap and easy way to stay warm throughout the winter and allows you to set the thermostat at a lower temperature. I've noticed that in today's modern world, people seem to think they should be able to wear shorts and t-shirts in their homes throughout the winter. This is fine if you want to pay for it. I'll take a lesson from my ancestors and just bundle up a little bit.
- ~ **Let the light in.** Be sure to open the window shades and blinds during the day. Sunlight coming in will act as passive solar heat and can make a significant difference in the temperature of your home.
- ~ **Turn the ceiling fans on.** This one may sound a little crazy, but it works. Most ceiling fans have a switch on them that allows them to run in reverse. By running the fan in reverse at a low speed, it will actually help circulate warm air throughout the house.

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Heating Bill cont...

- ~ **Seal the leaks.** At the beginning of winter, go around your home and seal up any potential air leaks with caulk or weather stripping. Most of the heat that leaves your home escapes through cracks around the windows and doors. To the extent possible, seal these up!
- ~ **Service your furnace.** A dirty furnace is not efficient and will cost more money to run than a furnace that receives annual cleaning from a professional. In addition to periodic servicing, be sure to replace those air filters.
- ~ **Cook a big Sunday roast.** Growing up in Maine, my Mom always cooked a Sunday roast. Pork or beef with carrots, potatoes, gravy, and all the other good stuff. It was a great tradition to bring the family together at least one day a week, and of course, the food was great, too. Coming from a frugal ilk, there was another reason she did it. Cooking a roast meant having the oven on for a few hours, and all that heat definitely escapes into the house. It doesn't cost much to run the oven, and it's also a nice way to spend a quiet Sunday in the winter with family.

I hope these simple tips prove useful and help you save some of your hard-earned cash this winter!



Returning to the real essence of the holidays

Five Tips for a Happy Thrifty Holiday

by Linda Shapero

With Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa right around the corner, we all have to make a decision. Do we choose another year of filling the corporate coffers, or do we go for a simpler, more meaningful holiday? One that will just say no to the credit card debt that hangs around months after the holiday and that will satisfy in ways of sharing that have nothing to do with the craziness that will soon begin at a mall near you.

Here are a few alternatives to what the retailers are hoping you'll do this year. Any of them will help reduce the financial and emotional stress of this time of year and will bring you back to the real essence of the holidays.

1. Plan a holiday meal for friends and family. This can even go as far as becoming a meal for your whole church where everyone takes part, or for the neighbors on your street. When everyone chips in, the sense of sharing is truly wonderful. Just the act of everyone sitting down together is spiritually uplifting. Your presence is the present.
2. Choose to "gift" a special family. Adopt a disadvantaged family in need of help for the holiday. You can usually find out about such families through church, work, or even your kids' school. This gift can be in the form of groceries, fixings for a holiday dinner, clothing and household goods, gift cards, or any combination of the above.

3. Opt for a Secret Santa or Pollyanna for gift giving. If you must experience the act of purchasing and wrapping a gift, this is a great way to still give but is inexpensive compared to having to buy for everyone. You can limit the amount to, say, \$10 and even go with a theme, if you like. Also, with only one gift per person, everyone will pay more attention when gifts are opened.
4. Make a contribution to your favorite charity or organization. There are so many agencies that depend on donations to keep them afloat. You may even be able to come up with something in your own backyard that offers a closer, more satisfying feeling of community.
5. Send a gift box or boxes to our troops overseas. Check the Internet. There are many sites dedicated to this type of giving. The whole family or your work family can put together gifts of homemade items, as well as other gifts to make our troops feel appreciated and remembered.

Now that we've got the ball rolling with some ideas, maybe you can think up a few more that will become traditions in your family. These will not only teach your children to appreciate the value of a dollar but think of giving and receiving in less materialistic terms.

Finding a way to fund your child's extra-curricular activities

Keeping Kids in the Game with Creative Financing

by Kathleen Frassrand

With family budgets stretched to the breaking point, many parents are canceling their children's costly extra-curricular activities. Before pulling out of little Katie's violin practice or Johnny's soccer team, consider some creative financing strategies.



~ **Know what you need.** Calculate exactly how much money each activity will cost. Be sure to include money for gas in your budget. Fuel prices can significantly increase the "true cost" of classes. Have a designated saving spot for all the cash you accumulate. This can be as simple as an envelope with "Gymnastics" on the front, or you can open a free savings account at the bank. Having a location earmarked for money ensures that it won't get sucked up in household spending.

~ **Host a garage sale.** When a favorite sport is at stake, children will give up a lot more of their unused toys and possessions. Clean out the closets and the garage and put it all up for sale. Not enough stuff? Ask friends and family members to donate their unwanted items too. When sale day is over, be sure to stash the cash in a special spot.

~ **Birthday cash equals swim team splash.** Instead of receiving another sweater or high-priced toy, ask Grandma to pitch in to the sports fund instead. Most relatives would rather help pay for a sport or activity that lasts all year than a toy that is discarded after a week. Who knows, your child might just hit the jackpot and get both the funds and the must-have new toy!

~ **Get creative with the household budget.** Drop those expensive drinks and switch to water. Make one meal a week vegetarian. Clip coupons, shop sales, and make a weekly menu. Raise your A/C by one or two degrees. Skip the brand-new wardrobe and stick to outlet and consignment shopping. Even a few dollars here and there add up to big bucks over the course of a month.

~ **Stop the small spending and start a coin jar.** Carrying cash in your wallet ensures that you will spend it. Stop

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Kids in the Game cont...

the fly-bys at the convenience store and the drop-ins at the donut shop. When you do spend cash, immediately place your change in a coin jar. The bucks add up and help push the sports fund over the top.

~ **Split up the weekly allowance.** If your children are old enough to earn an allowance, they are old enough to help fund the cost of their activities. Designate a portion of allowance to be added to the sports fund. Still short? Children can do a variety of jobs around the neighborhood to help raise money. Babysitting, lawn mowing, gardening, and dog walking are just a few options.

~ **Try trading services.** Small business owners love to trade services. Can you build a website in exchange for some classes or coaching? Can you scrub the gym once a week? How about offering to hand out flyers or donate some time answering phones? The possibilities are endless so don't be afraid to ask.

~ **Donate blood and platelets.** It's a win-win situation. There is great need for blood and platelets donation in the United States. Blood donation centers often give gas cards, gift cards, and even cash as a thank you. When redeeming a gas card, swap the corresponding cash out of your gas budget and into your sports fund.

~ **Look for scholarships.** Many organizations offer scholarships, and not just for school. Some are willing to fund sports and other activities that help children grow and develop a good moral character. Call around to the different clubs and organizations in your area to see what is available. Don't forget to talk to the heads of your sports organization, as some offer scholarships to the truly needy.

~ **Use credit card cash-back bonuses.** Using credit cards wisely can make you money, but only if you pay off your charges each month. Be sure your credit card has a cash back program, and pay all of your bills with that card. When you've racked up enough bonus cash, request a check. Remember to deposit the money directly into the sports/activity fund.

Sports, music, and specialty classes don't have to be sacrificed just because money is tight. Get creative, find the funds, and enjoy watching your children blossom in their chosen activity.

What is the true cost of convenience?

Convenience vs. Reality vs. the Wallet

by Steven Burns

A couple months ago, my coworker and I were running late for a meeting in another city. We knew lunch was going to be fast food because of this. Pulling into the parking lot, my partner said, "Use the drive-through, as it's quicker."

There was a car waiting to pull up to the ordering board and there was a line of vehicles around the corner to the pick-up window. We made a small wager and went inside to pick up our order. When we left, the car we would have pulled in behind had moved two spots forward. I won the bet and he paid for lunch.

My coworker was under the impression a drive-through allowed you to get food quicker. It means no such thing. It only means you don't have to get out of your vehicle.

Doing a little research, I found the drive-through takes roughly five minutes per customer. It didn't matter if it was a fast food restaurant, coffee shop, or bank.

Vehicles burn between one and four gallons per hour, depending on the number of cylinders the engine has and if it's a hybrid. Depending on your vehicle type, how long you wait, and if you keep your engine running, it can add up quickly. With today's gas prices, it doesn't take long to add another dollar or more.

Then I tried thinking of a place that sold items that made our lives more convenient. The grocery store? I found all kinds of things but will only compare a couple items. The prices are for where I live.

The first item is a 12-ounce package of salad mix, containing a mixture of iceberg lettuce, romaine lettuce, carrots, and radishes with no dressing. A one-pound bag of baby carrots costs \$2.29/pound. There are about one hundred carrots in the bag, and in the mix, they shredded about three for a cost of about \$.07. Radishes cost \$.79 for ten and they used about two in the mix for a cost of about \$.16.

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Convenience cont...

Romaine lettuce costs \$1.29/pound or \$.08/ounce. I'm estimating that they used six ounces for a cost of \$.48. Iceberg lettuce costs \$.99 for a 2½ pound head or about \$.02/ounce. Using another six ounces to fill out the bag costs an additional \$.15. Add it all together and it would cost you, if you made it yourself, \$.86. The pre-made bag costs \$3.49, a savings of \$2.63/bag.

Several aisles later, I found pudding snacks: four cups for 14 ounces. A box of pudding mix that makes 16 ounces costs \$1.05 or \$.92 for 14 ounces. A gallon of milk costs \$3.75 or \$.41 for 14 ounces. The tricky part is having something to put it in to take to work. Plastic containers cost \$3.99 for six. There isn't any way the convenience price can be beat if these containers are only used once. I have a set that I've used for over a year. We'll make the assumption they are replaced yearly so the price is \$.05 for four cups. The total cost is \$1.38 versus \$2.09 for the convenience, a savings of \$.71.

In the cooler section were gelatin snacks: six cups for 19.5 ounces. A box of gelatin that makes 32 ounces costs \$1.75 or \$1.07 for 19.5 ounces. We'll use the same assumption for containers as we did in the previous example: \$.08 for six cups. To make it costs \$1.15 against \$3.49 charged by the store, a savings of \$2.34.

There will be no argument that there is an energy cost to cool the pudding or gelatin, but it isn't that much. The argument comes when your personal time is put into the equation. My favorite is when a person says, "My time is worth..." and they mention some large amount. Get real.

I found a lot of items that were pre-made for our convenience. Very few were cheaper than if you made it yourself. Not to mention that you are putting what you want into your meal and making it as healthy as you want.

So, when you think about using the drive-through or picking up that pre-made item, consider if it's worth the extra cost for the convenience.



What does it all mean?

Understanding Write-Offs and Foreclosures

by Gary Foreman

Could you please give me some idea about charge-offs, foreclosures, and write-offs? I need to know on what grounds the banks will go for charge-off or foreclosure? What are the advantages of the above three to the bank? It would be great if you can explain with examples.

DG

DG asks a good question. We hear these terms and wonder what affect they have on the money that we owe. So let's see if we can't shed some light on the question and help DG avoid financial hardship.

We'll start with some definitions. For "write-off," we'll turn to the WallingfordCapital.com site. "The act of changing the value of an asset to an expense or a loss. A write-off is used to reduce or eliminate the value an asset and reduce profits."

In everyday English that means the lender has decided that one of its assets isn't as valuable as they say it is on the corporate books. For instance, your promise to pay the bank (car loan, credit card debt, mortgage) is an asset to them. They have it on the bank accounting records as something that has a specific dollar value. Generally it's worth what you owe on the debt.

When the bank "writes-off" part or all of your debt, they're saying that they don't expect you to pay the entire debt. So they're taking part or all of that debt and not counting it as an asset of the corporation any longer.

That does two things. First, it reduces the value of the corporation by the amount of the write-down. Second, it reduces the corporate profits by the same amount. That reduces income taxes.

OK, so what about a "charge-off"? For the most part, it means the same as a write-off. The main difference is that a charge-off is usually a loan that can't be collected. A write-off is often real property (building, vehicle, or equipment) that has lost its value.

One thing for DG to notice is that these are only accounting transactions. They do not release him from his responsibility to pay. Fair Isaacs, the company that started credit scoring, does not say whether a write-off or charge-off has a negative effect on your credit score. But, they do say that not paying back a loan on time does. So being late with your payment is a problem whether the loan is charged-off or not.

Ideally, DG would have contacted the credit card company (or whoever he owed the money to) as soon as he figured out that he couldn't repay it on time. Often the lender will agree to a

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Write-Offs and Foreclosures cont...

smaller payment over a longer time. If that doesn't solve the problem, DG could consider a credit counselor.

By the time the debt is charged-off, DG is in pretty deep. His credit score has been affected. Chances are that all of his credit cards are charging him penalty rates of up to 30%. And, bill collectors are beginning to call him. At that point, if he can't work out a repayment plan, he may need to consider bankruptcy.

What about foreclosure? According to Princeton.edu (Princeton University), it is "the legal proceedings initiated by a creditor to repossess the collateral for a loan that is in default." Typically, foreclosure is used in reference to real estate property, but it can be used for other physical property (your car for instance).

Foreclosure, unlike our other words, is not an accounting term. It's a legal term. It means that the company that holds a lien on your property (like a mortgage) has sued you. The suit will attempt to take possession and ownership of the property. In other words, you'll lose your house or car.

Once again the credit score is damaged when the payments fall behind. In this case, the foreclosure will lower it some more.

Whether the lender has started foreclosure or not, the borrower should take

the initiative and contact them if they are having trouble with the payment. The lender may adjust the payment terms.

DG asks what triggers the bank to foreclose or write-off a loan. There are all kinds of circumstances, but generally it's when the bank feels that you won't be able to repay the money you borrowed. Trying to predict exactly when a bank will foreclose or write-off is difficult and could be dangerous to your finances.

What's the bottom line to all of this? If you can't keep up with your payments, go to the lender as soon as possible and try to work out an easier payment schedule. Often they'd rather lengthen a loan than have to write it off or go through foreclosure.

Simply hoping that things will get better while you fall behind is a sure way to hurt your credit score and perhaps end up in legal troubles.

Gary Foreman is a former financial planner who currently edits The Dollar Stretcher.

Balancing efficiency and variety

Brown Bag Blues

by Tamara Wilhite

Making lunches in bulk often results in having the same thing for lunch all week. That's a good diet tip to control your appetite, but can wear out your palate by Friday, leading to a splurge at a vending machine. Or (gasp!) eating out to break the monotony.

We need balance between the efficiency of making lunches in bulk and our desire for variety. Otherwise, we'll end up with the brown bag blues; the thrill of the money saved by brown bagging it overwhelmed by every boring bite of your sandwich or salad.

Here are a few tips for preventing the brown bag blues.

When you have leftovers from dinner, especially when it isn't enough for a second dinner, put it in a small Tupperware container and pop it in the freezer. It's an instant lunch different from those made earlier in the week.

When making sandwiches, add variety as you add the ingredients. Make PB&J with PB and three types of jelly. Make cold cut sandwiches, but add cheese to some and not others and different toppings to each. You've made each one different, but you're within the same budget.

When making pasta for lunches for the week, make the pasta, sauce, meat topping, and pull out a pack of shredded cheese. An easy break down for variety amongst these toppings are:

- One a la dente
- One with sauce only
- One with meat only
- One with cheese only
- One with meat and sauce
- One with cheese and sauce
- One with meat, cheese, and sauce

Pick any 5 for variety without altering your ingredients.

When making rice and meat mixtures for lunches for the week, make the rice and meat mix together, and pull out a pack of shredded cheese. An easy break down for variety amongst these toppings are:

- One a la dente
- One with cheese only as a topper
- One with a can of corn tossed in
- One with a can of diced carrots mixed in
- One with a can of green beans mixed in

Have an emergency stash in your desk consisting of pop-top canned pasta or soup and a Tupperware container. If you have forgotten your lunch, you still get to brown bag. This also works well as an emergency dinner if you end up having to work late.

I hope these ideas help keep the brown bag blues away at your brown bag luncheon.

Tamara Wilhite, the author of Humanity's Edge, available on amazon.com. Visit at <http://humanitysedge.homeip.net/>

Know what you have and what you need

Into the Boomer Babe's Closet

by Lynne Cavanaugh

It was a rare, relaxed evening and this boomer babe was cozily browsing through an assortment of last month's style magazines that were checked out from the local library. Curled up at her feet, the family canine stretched and settled into his evening nap. Quite suddenly, the silence was shattered by raucous laughter. This boomer babe was reading wardrobe advice for the newest fashion season. The "must haves" looked like nothing functional for anyone over thirty and the advice to "toss anything you haven't worn in six months" was far too harsh for the thrifty (or the sane). These fashion "words of wisdom" were about as useful as the home improvement TV program that demonstrated how a budget of \$50,000 could transform the family kitchen into a high tech, chef's delight!

On one point, though, we do agree: cleaning and organizing your clothes closet is enormously helpful in making the best use of what you already have and easing your morning routine as you reach for clothing suitable for the day's activities. It is helpful to designate areas in your closet for cate-



gories useful to you, such as "Workplace," "Working at Home," "Better Casual" (for an evening with friends or a child's school program), "Bedtime," "Dirty Work" (for yard work or home improvement projects) and "Serious" (perhaps a wedding or a funeral). In this boomer babe's world, this latter category has the fewest number of selections and "Working at Home" has the greatest.

You may find that an outfit that has served you well in "Better Casual" needs to be re-purposed as "Working at Home," replacing an article now ready for a transfer to "Dirty Work." Finally, that

worn and stained tee shirt in "Dirty Work" can (and should) be cut into pieces for the rag bag.

When reviewing your closet contents, you may discover a surplus of, say, sweatshirts. Coordinating pajama bottoms culled from a clearance rack may be all that would be needed to create attractive and comfortable sets of pajamas. You may discover an unworn article of clothing that needs only a button or other minor mending to be returned to service. This boomer babe discovered a winter coat once worn

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Boomer Babe's Closet cont...

occasionally by a teenage daughter and in great condition. By removing the shoulder pads and tacking down the shoulder pleats, the coat was updated to the more tailored look that is fashionable today.

Perhaps there are items for which you have no coordinating pieces. Would the addition of a neutral pair of slacks, for example, blend with the orphaned tops? Ask yourself, "Am I truly in need of new shoes or do I have appropriate shoes that I have just never gotten in the habit of wearing?" When you are unhurried, it is much easier to coordinate outfits. Later, when you are time pressed, you will appreciate knowing which jacket blends with which skirt and which necklace adds just the right finishing touch.

When you have finished your work, you will have re-purposed some clothing from one category to another and repairs will have been made where necessary. You may well have some still serviceable clothing ready to be passed along to others (yard sale, Goodwill, etc.) and you will have a clearer picture of your clothing needs. Doing the organizing and research before we shop helps us focus on what we need and avoid distractions. Then, with our list in hand, we can head to our favorite shopping haunts assured of filling the gaps of our truly functional wardrobes.

Is there a gap in your auto coverage?

GAP Insurance

by Mark Albertson

Please read this before you buy your next vehicle! It makes no difference whether you plan to lease your next car or buy it. You need to protect yourself against the catastrophic loss of your vehicle. A loss that could cost you thousands of your hard-earned dollars.

In the twelve years I was in car sales, one form of protection was overlooked or underestimated by many customers. That protection was GAP insurance. GAP means Guaranteed Auto Protection. And here is how it works. Let's say that you buy a new car and six months later you have an accident. Your insurance company comes out and assesses the damage. The car is deemed a total write-off and your insurance company writes a check for the value of the car. Since the first year of ownership is when the greatest amount of depreciation occurs, the check will be noticeably less than what you paid for the vehicle. If you owed nothing on the vehicle, you have cash in hand now to purchase another. But if you owed more than what your old car was worth, your check is not going to satisfy the overage from your loan. And guess who is responsible for the shortfall? You are. And depending on how much you owe, that shortfall could cost you thousands of dollars. Unless, of course, you were smart enough to buy GAP insurance.

Let us put together a scenario that shows GAP in action. Suppose you buy a car that costs \$25,000. After tax, motor vehicle, incidentals and finance charges, the total

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GAP Insurance cont...

comes to \$32,000. You put down \$5,000 and finance the car for five years. This means over the next sixty months you owe the bank \$27,000.

Six months later, you have an accident and your insurance company totals the car. They reimburse you for what the car was worth and write a check for \$19,000. During that period of six months, you made six payments on your loan, totaling \$3,000. Subtract that from your starting balance of \$27,000 and you still owe \$24,000. But the check the insurance company wrote is for \$19,000. You now have to come up with \$5,000 to finish off the loan. If you had GAP, you could keep your \$5,000. The bank gets your insurance check and you get to breath easy.

Does every customer need GAP insurance? No. If you pay cash for your car, you do not need GAP because there is no loan outstanding against the vehicle. If you finance the car for three years or less, you probably will not need GAP. If you put down a large amount of money, say thirty percent, then the down would probably handle the depreciation, saving you from being upside down in the event of loss.

But if you are putting little or no money down and are financing for four years or more, chances are that you will need GAP. If you have suspect credit and get approved for purchase with a high rate of interest, you will need GAP. Whether or not you need GAP will depend on your calculations, so do your homework. There

is no reason to spend more money than you have to when buying a car.

If leasing your new car, GAP protection is imperative. Revisiting the above scenario of an accident six months down the road, the reimbursement check from your insurance company will most likely not cover your remaining lease payments plus the buy out printed on your lease contract. However, a number of states require lending institutions to include GAP in their contracts. So check your state laws. Don't let some smooth talking finance manager coax you into paying for GAP when by law it is part of the deal.

Where can you get GAP? Most dealers offer GAP, but you will pay top dollar for it there. Start with your insurance company. In fact, go over your current insurance policy. You might find GAP is included. If not, ask your agent for a quote. Also check other providers of GAP as well. Rating services like A.M. Best and Standard and Poor's can help here. Prices range from \$50 to \$100 per year. However, by shopping, you might find it for less. Once you have educated yourself on GAP pricing, you can not only negotiate the price of the car with your dealer, but also GAP protection as well. If you get GAP from the dealer, it will be included in your loan, which means you will pay interest on it. Unless, you pay for GAP in a lump sum.

Do not underestimate the safety net provided by GAP insurance. It could be the best car-buying decision you ever make.

Creating a pantry out of wasted space

My Story: A Basement Storage System

contributed by Anna

If you have a basement, the wall space going down the stairs is a great space to build shelving to store cans. Not only is this wasted space, but also most basement stairs are accessed close to the kitchen.

Build 4" wide shelves on a wall above where the first floor wall (usually 4" wide) meets the foundation (usually 8" wide). You'll never miss the 4" because the entire stair well narrows when it hits the foundation anyway, and you can line up your 3.5" cans two to three high very nicely. My pantry shelves are made of ordinary 2x4s cut 12" high that are spaced every 2' and 1x5 1/2" boards, painted white. Our two highest shelves are a bit wider (8") and spaced higher (18") so we can fit things like Tupperware and extra boxes of cereal (which are light and won't give you a concussion when you pull them down). Because they're higher than 6', the increased shelf width doesn't interfere with using the stairwell (although one of those reachers/grabbers that senior citizens use is handy to reach less-used goods stored on the most distant shelves so you're not stretching precariously over an 8-foot stairwell). The shelves are actually rather attractive if you paint them to match your décor.



If the stair well doesn't have interior wallboard, you can simply insert 2x4 cross-shelves every 12 inches high between the existing studs and then stack your cans. Painting is optional.

There is usually enough headroom to install a couple of 6-8" wide shelves across the end of the stairwell for stuff such as pasta. Just be mindful of the width of this shelf so you don't whack your head when you use the stairs. Our old house fit three lovely 12" shelves, but we didn't install a cross-stair shelf at the end of

the stairwell in our new house because the stairs are so steep and narrow. My tall husband would have been whacking his head on them. Use your judgement.

Lastly, since most doorjamb's jut out 4" or more from the wall, build another 4" wide (or wider if you have the room) set of shelves behind the basement door in the stair well. We were able to fit 5" wide shelves where boxes of macaroni fit very nicely.

To prevent cans from inadvertently getting knocked off the shelves when you use the stairs, buy 1/4" wide elastic from the sewing notions section of your local

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Storage cont...

department store. Staple or tack strips of this between the vertical supports of your shelves (or studs) on those shelves you'd be most likely to bump. Then, if you're a klutz like me, you won't knock down your beautiful display of alphabetized canned goods when you carry an overloaded basket of laundry up and down the stairs.

I always write the sell-by date in big letters on all my dry goods in dark magic marker so things don't expire. I also continuously push older items to the left and put newer items to the right (assembly-line style) as I buy them so that I'm always using the oldest items up first. Lastly, I store "like" items together on certain labeled shelves. Thanks to my "stair pantry," I always know exactly what I have, what I paid for it, and whether or not it's time to take advantage of that lost leader sale to stock up on enough of a specific item to last until the next sale.

Not only do stair-shelves free up valuable kitchen cabinets for other items (like your slow cooker), but also since most of your staples are highly visible, you'll know exactly what you have and avoid buying duplicates.

My Story is a regular feature of The Dollar Stretcher. If you have information that can help others save time or money please send it to: My Story c/o The Dollar Stretcher, PO Box 14160, Bradenton FL 34280.

When kids say it, it's a lame excuse

But I Want That

by Jeana Owens

When my kids were little, there was something they said that tickled me. When one of them was trying to take a toy from another child or playing with something I didn't want them to have, I would say, "You can't have that." And the response would be, "But I want that."

It cracked me up every time, because it was so absurd. Like I would really say, "Oh, you want that? I didn't know you wanted it! Well, then, take it!"

I would laugh at my kids for saying it, but now I realize how many times that was my justification for spending money on things we couldn't afford. "Look," I would say, "They have _____ and I've been wanting that for a long time."

If "I want it" wasn't justification enough, the length of time that I had wanted it was surely enough to tip the scales. Said item being on sale would remove all remaining doubt. I was being as ludicrous as my children were! How much money or month we had remaining didn't matter.

There are many things I do to make our dollars stretch. But the thing that changed our finances the most was when I realized that "but I want that" is not a good reason to spend money.

Jeana Owens is a frugal homeschooling mom with an odd sense of humor and a tendency to over-think things. You can read more about her at www.daystocome.net.

A college educated stay-at-home Mom is looking for part-time income

Finding Part-Time Work

I have been having the hardest time finding a part-time job. I am a college educated stay-at-home mom, but I can't even get hired at a national toy store! Granted, I can only work when my husband is home, which means after 6pm Monday through Saturday and all day Sunday. But, I have experience in retail. Any suggestions on how I can earn some extra cash or what companies or types of companies might hire me? It doesn't necessarily need to be a retail job.
Nichole in Saint Clair Shores, MI

Banquet Servers Needed

My husband and I have found the perfect part time job. It is flexible and pays well. We are banquet servers for the catering company at our city's convention center. We set up, serve, bus after the meals, and tear down the job at the end of the event. We simply went to the little catering office at the convention center and submitted an application. Quarterly, we give them our availability and only work a few days a month. We are paid minimum wage plus a percentage of the job as a gratuity. We always bring home (after taxes and union fees) at least \$20/hr.

Jenny

Part-Time Work Outside the Box

I was thinking of the stay-at-home mom who wants to find work after the working hours of her husband. Well, she may regret not spending that time with her husband. So, I had a few ideas that may keep her home with her kids and still make money.



In my area there is a lady with a baby in a stroller who comes by to walk my dog early in the morning. I am sick right now and can't walk that far, but the dog is still in need. So I pay her \$20 a week to do this for 20 minutes every morning. She gets the exercise and \$20 too. If this lady has three other customers like me, she could pull in \$80 worth of grocery cash and never need to go to the gym. This is better than \$8 an hour for her time.

I have girlfriends who housesit for others for \$150 or more. All they do is check on the house, pick up mail and newspapers, empty the answering machine, and answer questions if the alarm company calls. And they have

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Part-Time Work cont...

their children with them while they work.

One of my girlfriends needed just a few bucks to get by. When her husband has the kids on the weekend, she goes to make the pizza for a chain store. Weekends are very busy at pizza places and teens don't always want to work Saturday night. This doesn't get her any medical benefits, but for one or two days a week of work, she can earn enough to buy groceries.

Ally in Lake Worth, FL

Visit 24-Hour Stores

I train pharmacy technicians for Walgreens, and speaking personally, I wish you lived near me! We are always looking for people who want to work nights and weekends. After all, that's when our customers come. I recommend you put in your application online, and then go down to your local Walgreens and ask to speak with the store manager and/or pharmacy manager. Introduce yourself to them and tell them that you are looking for a part time position for nights and weekends. Let them know you have already put in your application online. I strongly recommend visiting a 24-hour store because they have more positions available. I would be very surprised if you didn't end up

with a position if you followed this advice.

B

What Are You Good At?

If you're so inclined, how about marketing yourself in tasks you can do at home and you are good at? You can proofread papers for students, tutor students of all ages, do editing for writers, take in sewing, do catering, fix healthy meals for working families, etc. If you're administratively inclined, there are Internet companies that place "virtual assistants." Do some research. Find something you like doing and then find people who could use your services. The possibilities are endless. Plus, you'll work from your home, you're your own boss, and you have a flexible schedule.

Cheryl

Consider Call Centers

Try call centers in your area. Many are open seven days a week, 24 hours a day and offer seasonal and part-time employment. Catalog call centers typically hire seasonal and part-time help this time of year. Consider call centers that have a work-at-home program where you can take calls from home.

Denise D.

Make yourself a harder target for identity thieves

Keep Your Identity (And Your Bank Account) Safe

by Jonathan Moeller

No matter how far you stretch a dollar, it won't do you much good if a thief steals your identity and snatches that dollar out of your bank account. Identity theft has become a multi-billion dollar problem, and it's getting worse. A British columnist recently wrote an article downplaying identity theft, and published his bank account number to prove his point. He did indeed make a point, but not quite the one he had intended; a thief took the number and drained out the columnist's bank account.

Needless to say, it's more important than ever to safeguard your personal information. Fortunately, most identity thieves and hackers are not the omniscient villains you might see on TV. Like any other kind of criminal, identity thieves are often criminals of opportunity. Just as there's no foolproof way to burglar-proof your home, there's no surefire way to protect yourself from identity theft, but you can do a lot to cut down the risk with a few simple strategies.

Make sure to thoroughly shred any financial papers you discard. Credit card statements, bank statements, car payments, investment reports, 401(k) papers, receipts, tax forms, and government documents all contain information that could be used in identity theft. College students might go dumpster div-

ing for cheap furniture, but the savvy identity thief knows that he or she might find useful documents that people neglected to shred. As a general rule of thumb, shred any document containing your name, an account number of any

kind, or your Social Security number. It's important to destroy any credit card offers you receive. Identity thieves will often use discarded offers to take out a card and rack up huge debts in their victims' names.

Thoroughly check all your bank and credit card statements for unusual activity. Many identity thieves will first draw out small sums

in order to test the waters on a particular account. If you monitor your statements, you can often spot abnormal activity and freeze the account before anything worse happens. If your bank or credit card company offers the option of checking your accounts online, you'll want to do so daily. If you do use online banking, be on guard against the Internet's most common form of identity theft, namely phishing, where a thief's website masquerades as a legitimate website in hopes of snaring personal information. Also never check your accounts from a public computer terminal, since you



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Identity cont...

might inadvertently leave personal information behind.

Credit cards have a bad reputation among the budget-conscious, but you may want to use them in place of a debit card. A debit card might be convenient, but it drains the money directly from your checking or bank account. If a thief uses your card, the money is gone from your account, and you'll have a hard time convincing the bank that you didn't spend the money. With credit cards, the money isn't taken directly from your bank account, which provides you an extra layer of protection. The protection is enhanced if you only use cards with a low maximum; even if a thief steals your credit card and maxes it out, the potential loss is lower than it could have been.

Mailboxes are a common vector for identity theft, especially in apartment complexes. There have been numerous documented cases of an apartment-dwelling thief pilfering the neighbors' mailboxes and stealing their identities. Getting a lock for your mailbox is an excellent idea. Or you may want to consider getting a P.O. box and sending your financial mail there. This, of course, will entail some extra expense, but it's cheaper than struggling to recover from identity theft.

In our world, there's no absolute guarantee of security from theft, but with a little care and forethought, you can make yourself a harder target for identity thieves.

Sewing know-how can save money

Stitches to Savings

by Phyllis Guth



You don't have to be an accomplished seamstress to save big bucks by making minor alterations to your wardrobe, sewing simple tier curtains or turning clothing no longer worn into useful items for the home.

When I started working full time, I stopped making clothes, draperies and slipcovers, but I never stopped sewing altogether. I found that there were genuine savings to be had if I were to do small jobs that weren't time consuming.

When a friend sent away for a special gift for me, a sweatshirt with cocker spaniels imprinted on the front that turned out to be much too long, I removed the bottom band, cut off the extra length and sewed the band back on. Since then, I've done it several times with other sweats.

Another sweatshirt, in a dark green, had a cream-colored collar. After a number of washings, the collar turned dingy, so I picked open the stitches attaching it to the neckline and removed it. A turtle-neck worn under the sweatshirt made a nice substitute.

I had a white cotton blouse with a fancy cutwork collar. After retiring, I seldom

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Stitches cont...

wore the blouse, so I shortened it and cut off the sleeves to wear it as a decorative dickey under sweaters and sweats. The neckband had a yellow tinge that no amount of scrubbing and bleaching would take away, so I simply removed the label from the back and wore the dickey inside out.

When I no longer needed my long paisley skirt, but hesitated to donate it to charity, I made it into a calf-length skirt. For best results, I use hemming tape when turning up skirts or pants.

Sometimes, I'm reluctant to part with a garment even though I seldom wear it. If that's the case, I look for ways to use the fabric. For example, I had a denim jumper with an embroidered bib top. I converted the skirt into a pillow cover and centered the embroidered part on the front of it. Another time, I turned a denim skirt into a clothespin bag, using my old purchased bag as a pattern.

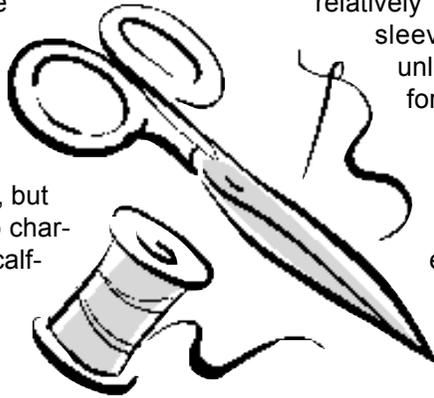
A cotton summer dress with an embroidered top and short-sleeved jacket made a lovely pillow. I was able to use the front opening of the jacket, complete with buttons and buttonholes, for the back of the pillow cover so it could be removed for laundering.

My husband wears a 32"-33" sleeve length, which is always difficult to find. Therefore, I sometimes bought the longer length and removed the cuffs, then re-attached them after cutting away a half inch or so. And it's usually relatively simple to shorten the sleeves of lightweight or unlined jackets and makes for a nicer appearance.

Unlined tier curtains and valances are easy to make and far less expensive than buying ready-made. We have a birdhouse-themed wallpaper border in one of our bedrooms.

I purchased the matching sheets and comforter, but balked at the almost \$100 price tag for the curtains. As luck would have it, the pattern also came in tablecloths and table runners. Because the tablecloth was made from the same fabric as the curtains, I bought several on sale and made them into tier curtains at about half the cost. The leftover fabric came in handy to recover the seat of a small dressing table stool in the room. I bought the matching table runners on sale and used them as dresser scarves.

Don't toss out leftover material after a sewing project. After making bathroom curtains from material that matched the wallpaper, I used a remnant to sew a



Stitches cont...

drawstring hanky bag for my husband's soiled handkerchiefs. Fabric left over from making a skirt for the powder room sink was used to add a matching border on the hand towels.

When we replaced our ruffled living room curtains, I turned one of the old ones into a tablecloth for a small round table. If you have odd-sized windows and can't find the proper size, why not buy the larger size and cut away the excess fabric, leaving a few inches for a generous hem?

When buying fabric for kitchen curtains, I bought enough to re-cover the seats of our dinette set (with my husband's help). This project didn't require any sewing as the fabric was stapled to the underside of the chair seat.

Toaster and can-opener covers require only a small amount of material. Use your present covers as patterns or measure the height, width and depth of the appliance and cut to fit, allowing extra fabric for seams. When I bought bargain-priced kitchen curtains, I purchased an extra pair to stitch matching covers for my small kitchen appliances.

As you can see, it takes very little effort to sew up big savings for your wardrobe and your home.

Painting advice from professionals

Paint Like a Pro

by Olivia Fox



Several fellows worked on our old, quirky kitchen recently. Their advice and efforts transformed that room. I picked their brains for the following tips:

- ~ If you've removed wallpaper, make sure the surfaces are thoroughly cleaned of paste before proceeding. Larry showed me a blotchy area. "See that? Some people put primer on it and still the paste bubbles through. Wash it down well before you paint."
- ~ Remove electrical faceplates and furnishings.
- ~ "You can't paint a crack," said Chuck. He introduced me to the joys of caulk. Make sure the surfaces are clean and dry. Cut the tube tip on a 45-degree angle with a smallish hole and run an even bead of caulk along the entire

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Paint cont...

crack's length. Wet a sponge and use it to keep your finger moist. Using a wet finger, smooth the caulk into the crack. Remember to release the tube after each run to avoid a delayed "splurt." Clean up while it's still wet. Let it dry about two hours before painting. The fellows like white ALEX PLUS by Dap, as it's paintable. Since the house is vintage with a lot of molding, we used almost four tubes.

~ Use dropcloths.

~ Quick drying primer allows you to do the actual painting the same day. They recommended BIN by Zinnser. It's ready in 45 minutes. The smell isn't unpleasant but is very strong, so ventilate the place. It's a bit drippier than regular paint. Clean up immediately using ammonia.

~ I found out the hard way that a good quality sashing brush is economical. My \$4 special did not paint evenly or precisely. Scott told me that he spends about \$15 on one. He cleans it well after each use with an ammonia and water combo (for latex paints, as well as BIN). Make sure it's thoroughly dried.

~ Ceiling white is chalky and non-reflective and makes a smooth looking ceiling. Quality washable wall paint is a wise expenditure too. You'll get truer color, and it's more durable

than the cheap stuff. Pick one shade lighter than you like, as it seems darker over larger surfaces. "Cut in" first before filling in with a roller.

~ Chuck muttered, "I hate tape." After I pulled the blue edging tape up along with some of the wall paint, I found out why. He cuts paint in against the ceiling with his good angled paint brush. That makes a clean line. Larry suggested that if I insist on tape, remove it immediately after painting. The fellows felt it works alright to protect flooring (for painting kickboards). From then on, I took it up right after painting. Splotches cleaned up easily too.

~ Dip the brush bristles less than an inch into the paint. Though the fellows didn't say outright, I noticed Chuck didn't load his brush as much as I would have. Rollers should be evenly saturated, not dripping. Choose a nap appropriate for the wall's texture.

~ "Every paint needs two coats unless the color's very similar," Chuck told me. Here I thought blotchy walls were from my amateur technique. He's right.

After the caulk, primer and second coat, the walls look seamless. Thanks guys for your help!



How much is the struggle worth?

Triumph!

by Pamela Parks

Consider two gifts: one given and one earned. Both are important items that you deeply want. The first is given as a Christmas present, wrapped in shiny paper. The other you earn yourself, pulling long hours at an after-school job. Is the earned item sweeter than the gift? Maybe. For some, the agony of the effort sours the reward. For others, the triumph over adversity imparts an added value.

I believe that this is a key concept behind frugality. For some, it is triumph, and for others, it is defeat. And a lot of the difference depends on attitude.

My husband and I have struggled hard to craft a house and finances and a lifestyle of our own design. These struggles have built us up, I believe. The challenges have all been things we could triumph over, and so with each challenge, we feel stronger. I take three vital lessons from our experiences.

The first is choice. We had a choice with our house. We could have remained in our previous situation, which was tolerable enough but less than we wanted. We chose instead to accept the challenge of building a home, and obviously, we could face this challenge at a time and place of our choosing.

The second point is that we had to work to achieve our goal. We had to think long and hard about the design and weigh wants versus needs. Kitchen cabinets, floors, trim and molding cost too much. We could save by installing these things ourselves. Once we triumphed and finished the house, the “sweat equity” that we’d invested made it all that much sweeter.

Third is that with our house (or other fun goals, such as a vacation) we were moving toward something. There is a goal, a reward, or something to achieve. Being able to sleep at night because unpaid bills are not hanging over your head is nice. Marking the day on the calendar that a student loan or a credit card debt is paid off gives one real motivation. Having that goal ahead of you makes all the difference, and each plateau along the way is a triumph where you savor your old accomplishments and rest before pushing onward to new heights.

It’s easy for the “frugality” struggle to have no goal. It’s a hand-to-mouth existence, and managing it is a dreary exercise in stark survival. But we made it a goal. Now, where there is an issue of frugality, we are re-examining our lifestyle, our society’s consumer messages, planetary ecology, and issues of true satisfaction. There is a real purpose and destination. We think

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Triumph cont...

about what we really need, and how to obtain that with the least impact and with the most benefit (to our pocket book, to our health, and to the world at large).

The whole frugality/money struggle has been an amazing voyage. We have been forged under fire. During the course of the struggle, we are forced to make priorities and trade-offs, so that we know how much our gain is worth. The battle focuses us ("eyes on the prize") so that the real goal, the one we are striving for, looms large in our sight.

What makes a simple struggle into something more uplifting? It's that feeling of "This is where my life is meant to be, this is where I want it to be. This is what I have deliberately created for myself." I have replaced a house full of useless junk with a life filled with learning and discovery. Given what we have come through and what we've accomplished so far, I can only wonder what is to come.

**Ask Bob:
The Auto Answer Man****Expensive Oil Pump Replacement**

Hi Bob,
I have a Ford F150 2003 model with 65,000 miles. I was told that I need an oil pump and it would be \$1200. That seems pricey. An idea what it should cost?

Kristen

Kristen,
The oil pump is located in the oil pan. In order to change it, you need to remove the oil pan. However, on some vehicles, the oil pan cannot be simply removed. Usually there are suspension members in the way. So, you either have to remove the suspension member or remove the engine. The price of the pump is relatively low and the actual install process is quite easy. However, this is one of those parts where getting to it is a lot of work!

Good Luck!

Drive Safely!

Bob, The Auto Answer Man

If you have a question for Bob, send it to AskBob@stretcher.com. He's able to answer many of them personally and we'll include the best questions in future issues of The Dollar Stretcher.

Readers' Tips

Small Paint Touch-Ups

If you like crafts and need to paint small things, use cotton swabs. The cotton swab is flexible and fits in small areas. They cost a lot less than paintbrushes. You can find cheap swabs at the dollar store. You just throw them away when done with no messy clean up.

Delores G.

Use It All

Tired of trying to dig out the mayonnaise in small neck jars in your fridge? Turn the jar on its side and the mayonnaise will settle on the side. You'll be able to reach in with a knife and not get mayonnaise on your fingers or the knife handle.

Robert P. in Aloha, Ore

Save the Nail Polish

Have you ever thrown away a bottle of nail polish because even though there is still polish in the bottle, the brush can't quite reach it or because you just hate the color? Well, don't throw it away. You can either combine several almost empty bottles of polish to make a new fuller bottle that is also a new color, or combine an undesirable color with some older almost empty favorites to tone the color down.

D. K. in Hudson, MA

How Much Per Hour?

Prepare bag lunches at night, rather than buying lunch every day. It takes very little time and saves very much money! I've often watched a co-worker unwrap a bowl of cut-up melon or veggies, for which she paid \$4. One serving for \$4! Preparing it would take between one and three minutes. Think of it as getting paid \$20 to \$60 per hour, tax free, for the time it takes to make your lunch.

Rivka K.

Student Perks

I am a college student and have learned that I can save a ton of money on Internet fees, ink, and paper by using the computer lab at my school. The use of the lab, including Internet access and printing, is included in tuition fees (I'm on Pell Grant). I do all of my Internet research, reports, and printing there. This has saved an average of \$20/month for Internet service, \$5 for computer paper, and another \$10 for ink (I used an average of 1/3 of a black cartridge per month at a cost of \$30 per cartridge). That's \$35 into my savings account.

Also included in the cost of tuition is free, unlimited use of the school gym, which includes an indoor walking track, heated indoor pool, and weight room. Goodbye gym membership, hello savings!

Christy S.

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Readers' Tips cont...**Friends Who Cook Together**

Find a friend, maybe one afternoon a month, to prepare meals in bulk and separate into freezable containers. Then you'll both have meals to take out of the freezer and heat up. If you do this with another busy mom, you can buy the ingredients in bulk and split the cost. Believe me, the five to six hours that you spend will save you tons of time in the long-run.

I have found that before you start cooking, if you do all the prep work like chopping onions, etc., it helps a lot, especially if you have several recipes going at the same time. The first time my mom and I did this, it took a lot longer because we didn't prep first. There are a lot of websites out there that give ideas on meals you can prepare in bulk for this purpose. One of my regular things to make is marinara sauce and it freezes well in the zipper bags. Keeping a list of what you've prepared helps, too.

Alyce

Razor Care

Do not leave your razor in the shower. After each use, dry your razor (whether disposable or regular) with a towel. You can use a hair dryer if necessary. Store it where it will stay dry until the next time you need to use it. The razor blade will stay sharp much longer.

Rose

Birthday Party Two-fer

At my daughter's 9th birthday sleepover, I wanted to do something creative with the kids that would also double as their "goodie" for coming. So, I bought each attendee an inexpensive white pillowcase. Then at the party, each girl decorated her own pillowcase with fabric markers in a rainbow of colors. Because my daughters and I love to do crafts, we already had the markers on hand. The kids had a blast decorating the pillowcases. It was fun to watch their creativity in action. Then, at the end of the evening, I gave them each a stuffed teddy bear that I bought at a dollar store to go with their pillowcase. They were so excited to cuddle up in their sleeping bags! It made bedtime relatively easy, which was an added bonus.

The best part of this idea is that the pillowcase is something that my daughter will always have. I have washed it multiple times since then and the colors in her pillowcase have never faded, keeping her memory of her 9th birthday alive.

Pam H.

Fresh Spices

Whenever I purchase new spices, I put the containers in the freezer in a plastic shoebox container. They stay fresher, especially if you do not bake regularly.

Jane A.

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Readers' Tips cont...

Sharp Looking Gift Tags

Instead of buying gift tags for presents, use the color cards that paint companies produce to show the colors of their paints. They come in various sizes and you should be able to find any color to match your wrapping paper. If you don't have any color cards around the house, ask a paint store for their cards of discontinued colors that they are going to throw away anyway.

Kristel W.

Affordable Area Rugs

Ask your local carpet dealer if they ever sell samples or if they ever donate them. I recently purchased several large, well-made sample rugs for \$35 each from a local Habitat Restore. They have a small square on the ends with the word "sample" printed on it, which is the backing only. I positioned the rugs so the wording is under furniture. The look is beautiful, elegant, and much more quiet and warm since I have hardwood floors.

Jackie D. in Durant, IA

Fresher Crackers

In order to keep Saltine crackers fresh longer, I store them in the freezer. I do this for both opened and unopened packages. My mother passed on this tip to me and I can tell you it really works!

Jackie V.

Free Bath Toys

Why buy toys for the bathtub? Instead, recycle empty plastic containers from your kitchen, such as parmesan cheese shakers, spice jars, and mustard squeeze containers. Once cleaned, they work great as bath toys and sand/water table toys. It's better for your wallet and the environment too!

Mondisa

Suggest a Purchase

Our library (like others) has a service called "suggest a purchase." Using that, I have requested that the library purchase specific materials. Even though some are quite expensive, the library has bought almost all of them.

I try to suggest only items that would be of interest to many people in the community. For example, our library hosts knitting groups two evenings a week. So, I have suggested and the library has purchased several knitting books that have good reviews online. We have a large community of science geeks as well, so DVDs of *Dr. Who* and *Torchwood* were bought because of my suggestion.

Another benefit is when the library purchases a new item because of a patron's suggestion, that patron gets to be the first to check the item out!

Jora

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Readers' Tips cont...**Blocked Kitchen Sink Sprayer?**

The hose sprayer on our kitchen sink became clogged with water deposits, leaving only a few jets for water to pass through. As I began to take apart the sprayer to clean it, I thought there must be a quicker solution. I filled a cup with vinegar soaked the sprayer head in it for 5 minutes. Viola! The sprayer looks and works like new.

Nick M. in Pullman, WA

Better Baby Shower

When the ladies at my church asked me if I wanted a baby shower for my third baby, I had already stockpiled and saved practically everything my baby will need when she arrives. Everybody spends a fortune on the first baby, but with subsequent children, we know just how few of the common baby shower gifts are actually put to good use. I considered turning the shower down.

Then one of the ladies had a brilliant idea. She suggested a diaper shower! If you're on your second (or 15th!) child, chances are that you have most of the things you'll need to clothe, bathe, and care for your baby, but that doesn't mean your friends and family can't help you over the financial hump of a new baby. Diapers are something you can never have too many of!

Cindy D.

Do I Really Need...

I have tried to be thrifty all of my life. I am skeptical of the true value of many items other people see as necessities. For example, after several years of using conditioner on my hair after shampooing, I tried going without and truly could not see any difference. I also find that inexpensive shampoos work just fine. I also think that fancy gels for shaving my legs are unnecessary. A lather of ordinary hand soap does the same job for a lot less money. Why not see if these ideas work for you?

S. in VA

Longer Lasting Pantyhose

I sell hosiery at Von Maur and a lot of my customers always complain that their pantyhose are not lasting as long as they want. I always suggest putting pantyhose in the freezer after purchasing them. This works great. Since I have to wear pantyhose to work, it's great to stock up and leave some pantyhose (in the original packaging) in the freezer until the ones I'm wearing start developing runs.

Tiffany in IL

Send your time- or money-saving tips to Dollar Stretcher Tips, P.O. Box 14160, Bradenton, FL 34280-4160 or by email to Tips@stretcher.com.

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