



Use less, spend less, stress less this holiday season

Debt is not something anyone wants to receive for the holidays. The events of 2020 have left most Kentuckians with less money to spend on nonessentials like holiday gifts, travel, and celebrations. Tighter budgets do not have to mean a more stressful holiday season. Remember, never go into debt buying a present, taking a trip, or throwing a party you cannot afford. Holiday celebrations should bring us joy rather than stress.

If the events of the past year have left your holiday budget anything but cheerful, consider ways to reduce your costs (and stress) this holiday season.

Use less

National Use Less Stuff Day is Nov. 19, 2020, an informal holiday that began as a way to raise awareness of how much “stuff” we consume, especially during the holiday season. In the spirit of this holiday, the Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service is encouraging people to take part in the Use Less, Spend Wi\$e Challenge where we highlight ways to cut our consumption, save money, and connect with others in budget-friendly ways. One option to reduce our expenses is simply to use less stuff by omitting, conserving, downsizing, and reusing.

- When you OMIT things, you decide to cut out or reduce material consumption. For example, reducing your disposable waste by using fewer paper and plastic products like plates, napkins, and cutlery.
- When you CONSERVE, you look for ways to lower energy use and the consumption of natural resources. For example, turning off lights when you leave the room or adjusting your thermostat to reduce heating and cooling bills.
- When you DOWNSIZE, you decide to donate, sell, or discard things you no longer need or use. For example, do you really need 25 ceramic coffee mugs or clothes you have not worn in a decade?
- Finally, when you REUSE something, you decide to reuse or repurpose things you already own (or things from a previous owner) before making a brand-new purchase. For example, shopping consignment saves money and gives new purpose to existing “stuff.”

Spend less

In addition to using less, being a mindful consumer includes spending wisely. Developing wise spending habits is important all year long, including the holiday season. When we find ways to reduce spending, we create opportunities to save. If you worry your holiday budget will be tighter this year, look for ways to cut unnecessary expenses.

- Are there monthly subscriptions you can cancel, such as streaming or cable services, unused memberships, or auto-deliveries? Do you often eat out, order takeout, or treat yourself to specialty coffees? Look for “spending leaks” that might be draining your budget slowly. Plug those leaks, and put that money towards your holiday expenses.
- Establish a realistic holiday budget, cutting costs where you can. Most importantly, stick to it! Prioritize where to allocate your resources, and plan ahead. The effects of the pandemic will continue to be felt this

holiday season. Expect shipping delays and surcharges, inventory shortages, and social distancing guidelines that cap the number of shoppers in stores.

- Save money on holiday decor this year by making the most of what you already have. Reuse holiday decorations from past years or repurpose nonseasonal decor by adding colorful ribbons, greenery, or pinecones. Also establish new, low-cost traditions that double as holiday activities while adding a festive touch to your home. Think homemade salt dough ornaments, paper snowflakes, and popcorn, paperchain, or cranberry garland.

Stress less

Holiday stress often comes from increased demands on our schedules and wallets. During the holidays, we pile extra travel, celebrations, and gift exchanges atop everyday home, work, and school commitments. Attempting to balance it all can be challenging. This year, the pandemic may also add stress to the holiday season.

With everyone experiencing effects of the pandemic, many families are in similar financial situations this year. Initiate extended conversations with family, friends, or colleagues about ways to scale back over the holidays. Challenge loved ones to exchange DIY gifts rather than purchased ones. Consider your time, talents, and resources and how you can gift what you have instead of buying “stuff.”

Finally, be intentional about having fun this holiday season. Having fun does not have to be expensive. Make hot chocolate at home, then bundle up and drive around town to look at holiday lights. Stuck at home? Have a karaoke contest to your favorite holiday songs. Travel canceled? Use your downtime to declutter a space, then make plans to sell or donate what you no longer need.

For more ways to use less, spend less, and stress less this holiday season, contact your local Cooperative Extension office to learn how to participate in the Use Less, Spend Wi\$e Challenge!

Reference

“Fun Holiday – Use Less Stuff Day” (Retrieved Sept. 11, 2020) <https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/fun/use-less-stuff-day>

Source: Nichole Huff, Ph.D., CFLE, Assistant Extension Professor, Family Finance and Resource Management

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