



Holiday Budgeting Tips to Keep Seasonal Stress Down

Nothing is more heartwarming than seeing your loved ones' faces light up when they open that perfect gift you (or Santa) gave them. The holidays will look different this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why most people will try even more challenging to make the season brighter for others. But, you don't have to dip into the kid's college savings to create a special time for everyone! The most important thing to remember is to plan ahead: Have a set spending amount for gifts, wrap, entertaining, and donations.

Make a list and check it twice

Many are struggling financially this year, so it will be no surprise to those outside your family if your gift-recipient list is shorter this year. Once you trim your list, make a holiday treat or handmade token for those who got the cut. It really is the thought that counts.

Once you have your list complete, figure out a realistic amount to spend on each person. Jot down a couple of gift ideas in your price range for that person.

Due to the pandemic, holiday shopping is already in full swing. Most people want to avoid crowds, so they are already hitting the malls. Retailers are well aware of this trend, and are offering pre-Black Friday sales and discounts. Spreading out your holiday shopping over several

weeks also makes it easier on your budget. Always shop with a list and keep track of your spending. As you buy your gifts, subtract from your total budget.

In addition to shopping the sales and collecting coupon codes for online purchases, know when to buy. December is the best time to buy cars, appliances, winter clothing, and electronics. Also, know how much items cost before a markdown to see if you're really getting a deal. It is expected that online shopping will increase by 35% this year because shoppers don't feel comfortable being in stores. Some states still have restrictions limiting retail establishments' capacity and store hours.

If you're shopping online, order early, and expect delays in shipping. Increased shopping during the holidays will affect already-strained delivery companies. To avoid shipping delays and higher shipping costs, shop at stores that offer "buy online, ship to store" service. This service is free at most retailers, some of which provide curbside pickup. Get the best deals on cards, decorations, and gift wrap during the days right before and after Christmas. Discounts of up to 75% off can shave a lot off your holiday budget for next year.

Entertaining

Due to the pandemic, most folks will host smaller holiday gatherings this year, which will save tons on food and treats. Many people are still working from home, so work parties and gift exchanges also will be virtual or postponed, keeping cash in your wallet. If you're hosting guests, keep costs down by asking everyone to bring their favorite side or dessert and include festive recipe cards with the chef's name.

Use DIY decor featuring natural items, like holly and pinecones. Gather the kids and go on a hike to find outdoor holiday decorations. Not only will it save you money, but it will also give you some stress-free outdoor time with your family. Save more by partying without plastic. Disposable plates and dinnerware are not great for the environment or your budget.

Charitable giving

The holidays are a time for goodwill toward all. But if your budget cannot accommodate a monetary donation, volunteer your time. If you can make a financial donation, be sure to check that the charity you are supporting is legitimate by consulting [Charity Navigator](#). Picking accredited organizations also allow you to claim your donation on your taxes. You can learn more about claiming donations on your taxes [here](#).

Keep your holiday dollars in check, and you may have some holiday spirit left over even after the last elf is packed away and the January bills start rolling in.