



## 100 top tips for tough times

There are many areas where saving a few cents (or even dollars) can help you keep ahead of the bills. Here are 100 tips to cut back your spending and obtain better value for the money you do spend.

### Around the home

1. Insulate your house, especially in areas where winter heating is necessary. Savings made on heating bills will generally pay for the insulation, and the house will also be more comfortable in summer.
2. Seal your house against draughts by using draught excluders available from hardware, department and homeware stores.
3. Use electric blankets to heat beds used by adults – heating the whole room consumes more energy. In winter close off unused rooms from the heated area of the house.
4. Remove dust and fluff from the coils of electric appliances such as heaters (when they are turned off) and refrigerators to improve their efficiency.
5. Plant deciduous trees along the sides of your house exposed to the hot summer sun. The shade keeps the house cooler in summer, but in winter, when the leaves have fallen it will still be warmed from the sun.
6. Grow vegetables and fruit in a home garden. Vegetables such as zucchini, beans and silver beet will grow well with little effort. Some types of fruits need spraying and pruning. This doesn't have to consume a large amount of your time, but should be done methodically and at the correct time of the year.
7. Look for organic solutions for garden plants so you don't have to pay for expensive chemicals.
8. If your hose springs a leak, repair it by cutting out the leaking section and joining the two sections with a joiner kit available from supermarkets and hardware stores.
9. Use rechargeable batteries if you have a lot of battery-powered devices (for example, toys and radios). You will recover the cost of the rechargeable batteries and charger from savings on expendable batteries.
10. Some small appliances (for example, calculators) operate from either batteries or plug-pack battery eliminators, which run on electricity. For frequent use, plug-packs can be more economical than expendable batteries.
11. Keep the guarantee and warranty information, instructions booklets and sales receipts from newly purchased products. If a fault occurs in the warranty period, a guarantee could provide free repairs. Save the expense of an unnecessary service call by reading the instruction book carefully. You might find a feature you are not using correctly.
12. Collect rain water in clean containers to substitute for distilled water in irons.
13. Wait until you have a full load before running dishwashers, washing machines and dryers.
14. Tear up old clothes for use as cleaning rags and save on the cost of paper towels.
15. Fix any leaking taps promptly, especially if expensive hot water is dripping away.
16. Consider buying a microwave oven. It uses less energy than a conventional oven and cooks much faster. Vegetables and casseroles are particularly suitable for microwave cooking. Do remember, however, that a microwave oven could be more expensive to repair.
17. Do your own repairs (on clothing for example). Toys can often be repaired with special glues.



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18. For new lights, install fluorescent tubes or eco globes which use less power than ordinary light globes for the same light output. These are especially useful in areas of high use where they will be used for long periods for example, the kitchen.
19. Select light globes of the correct power for the purpose for example, bedroom lamps.
20. Use warm water instead of hot in your washing machine, or consider cold water which will save you the cost of heating the water, and with the appropriate detergents can give good results.
21. A manual defrost fridge will often use less energy than an automatic no frost model.
22. Always use outside drying instead of electric dryers when possible.
23. To conserve water, use water from the rinse cycle of a washing machine to water the lawn.
24. If possible, have your hot water system running on off peak electricity, as this is a cheaper rate.

## Shopping

25. Before shopping for groceries, write a list of the items you need. When in the store, limit additional purchases to items genuinely omitted from the list and much-used items found at good prices.
26. Eat fresh fruit and vegetables instead of packaged tinned ones. Fresh is usually cheaper and more nutritious.
27. Widen the variety of fruit and vegetables you eat, and concentrate on eating those which are in season, when plentiful supply often means prices are lower.
28. Buy fruit and vegetables at a produce market. Stallholders compete for business, there is a wide choice and often they are cheaper than supermarkets.
29. Buy fruit juices in concentrate packs, which are cheaper than regular strength packs.
30. Try generic brands (unnamed). Some may be lower quality, however others are no different. House brands (carrying the supermarket name) should also be considered as they are often positioned between generic and brand names in price and quality.
31. Check whether buying products in large-size boxes is more economical than buying the smaller sizes. For perishable items, be sure that the quantity in a large box will be used before it spoils.
32. Cut down on the quantity and quality of the meat you consume. Try meals containing a smaller proportion of meat and those using less expensive cuts for example, casseroles.
33. Consider buying poultry as whole birds. This is often cheaper than buying chicken in pieces.
34. When calculating the cost of meat, the relevant figure is the cost per serve. A cut which is more expensive than another on a per kilo basis can be less expensive on a per serve basis.
35. Do not assume that a large sign in a supermarket drawing attention to an item and its price means that it is a special price. Sometimes this is only a means of selling more of a slow moving item.
36. Stock up on any non-perishable items you know you will need eventually (for example, light globes) when they are selling at a special price.

## Use of money

37. Prepare a budget sheet which sets out for each month of the year how much money you are likely to receive, and the bills and expenses to be paid. With a budget you can see whether you are living beyond your means and can plan to have money available to pay bills when they are due.
38. Understand all the advantages and disadvantages of your credit cards. Is there a time when interest is not charged? Credit cards are convenient but don't let them encourage impulsive buying. Interest charged is calculated



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and added daily so if you are only paying minimum repayments you can accrue a large debt. It is best to only put on a credit card what your budget can afford to pay at the end of each month.

39. Shop around for financial services. See if direct debit and other bill paying services are free of charge. Check out the banks and credit unions to see what benefits they offer. Bpay, which can be set up with your bank, is a no extra cost way to pay bills over the phone or on the internet.

40. Plan gift buying ahead of time. You will often find suitable gifts at lower prices during sales and you can avoid the rush before holiday periods, such as Christmas time. Some retail stores also offer lay by services.

41. Plan buying a house one or two years beforehand. This will enable you to investigate the most suitable sources of finance and save for a deposit before committing to finance for a housing loan.

## Car matters

42. If buying a car, the dealer may offer to arrange a loan and insurance as well. But, investigate other possibilities – you will almost always obtain a better deal by shopping around. For consumer loans check out credit unions, banks etc.

43. Shop around for car insurance. The premiums for a particular model of vehicle often differ considerably among companies. CTP Green slip insurance is compulsory in NSW and provides cover for personal injury. Comprehensive insurance provides cover for car theft and damage, while third party property car insurance (you need to own the car outright) covers you for damage done to someone else's property with your car.

44. Before lodging an insurance claim for the cost of repairing damage to your car, check for a future loss of no-claim bonus. The insurance payout you receive could be more than offset by the loss in your no-claim bonus or the excess may be more than the damage repair costs.

45. Many insurance companies offer a discount for having all your insurance with that organisation. Check first the cost savings and the cover the insurance company offers for that cost.

46. You may be able to pay insurance premiums monthly instead of annually, without incurring a penalty for doing so. It should be easier to pay a small amount each month by direct debit than a large amount once a year.

47. Perform simple and routine maintenance checks on your car for example, maintain the correct tyre pressure, as this improves safety and prolongs tyre life. Check the radiator, engine oil, and automatic transmission fluids are at the correct level as failure to do so can lead to expensive problems.

48. Check around for car repair costs as they can vary. Ask friends or family who they use and if their costs are reasonable obtain a quote. Always ask the price before the repairs start.

49. Check supermarkets and department stores for car requirements such as oil. Their range is often limited, but they are generally cheaper than automotive specialty stores.

50. A manual transmission car will cost less to run than an automatic and give better fuel economy. A manual also often needs less maintenance.

## Miscellaneous

51. Make STD calls in the off-peak period. Check with your telephone provider on off-peak periods and charges.

52. Check your mobile phone contract to be fully aware of costs, including what is covered by a 'cap' so you don't incur additional costs. If you are in a contract you are required to pay the monthly fee each month, plus additional call costs until the contract end date, or large penalty costs will be incurred.

53. Don't give in to sales pressure to sign a contract or buy immediately. It could possibly be a bad decision. Don't sign any papers which contain blank spaces. If you don't understand or haven't read a document completely, don't sign it – you could be stuck with a costly contract you cannot escape.

54. Find a free local newspaper which contains a television program guide. Use this instead of buying a guide.



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55. Take a home prepared lunch to eat at work instead of buying lunch.
56. Try to spend time comparative-shopping especially for expensive items. A salesperson might even offer you a better price when you say you are comparing prices. Remember to use your discount card if you have one.
57. Consider buying second hand items. Many people buy used cars, and there are also savings to be made from buying quality second hand bicycles, cameras, furniture, books and musical instruments.
58. Don't tolerate faulty or low quality products. Complain politely and ask for a refund or an exchange. If an item is faulty and the shop will not exchange or provide a refund, contact <http://www.dft.nsw.gov.au/> or phone Fair trading enquiries on 13 32 20.

## Phone bills

59. Request monthly, rather than quarterly telephone bills as monthly payments may be easier.
60. Write letters or emails to friend or family overseas or interstate rather than calling, or use free over internet voice services where available.
61. Call at off-peak times.
62. If you have been disconnected due to non-payment of a Telstra account, you can enquire about their 'In Contact Service'. This allows calls in to your home phone and 000 and Telstra calls only out. Conditions apply such as no other Telstra services for example, internet, mobile or Foxtel billed to Telstra. You must agree to all criteria to have this service.
63. Shop around for cheaper calls. Telecommunication companies have discount rates for long distance and international calls, and some telephone companies can also give you cheaper rates for local calls. You need to make a note of the type of calls you usually make before deciding to change to another telephone company, and compare the cost of what you are paying now with what you will pay if you change. Don't forget the specials, which are often advertised in the daily paper or on television. If you are in a contract you may not be able to switch companies without incurring costs.
64. If you have problems with paying your telephone bill, ring the company and make arrangements to pay by instalments. Do not wait until you are about to be disconnected. If you have a complaint about a telephone/internet company visit <http://www.tio.com.au/>

## Electricity

65. Reduce your use of hot water. Take shorter showers instead of baths and wash your clothes in cold water.
66. Any appliance that is not in good working order will cost more to run.
67. Use lights and heating only in the rooms you are using. Turn off lights when you leave the room if it is unoccupied.
68. Turn off the TV if no one is watching it.
69. Leave the heater off and put on another layer of clothes – heaters and air-conditioners use the most electricity of all appliances.
70. Increase temperatures on reverse cycle air-conditioners during summer and decrease during winter, as every degree lower or higher than the thermostat needs to be increases heating/cooling costs by 10%.
71. Clean any obvious coils/filters on refrigerators and air-conditioners.
72. Clean windows regularly to maintain a high level of natural light and reducing the amount of money spent on lighting.
73. Don't leave the fridge door open longer than necessary.



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74. Reduce the temperature setting of your fridge and freezer to the lowest recommended temperature. Around 4°C is fine – anything lower than this is wasting power. Keep the rear coils clean and 10cm away from the wall as this allows air to circulate around them and aids the cooling process.
75. If curtains are kept closed during the day, it will reduce the heat conducted through the windows by half. Use your curtains to add extra block out from the sun during summer.
76. Fans are cheap to install (by comparison to air-conditioners) and have lower running costs.
77. Seal gaps around doors and windows.
78. Keep living rooms closed off from unheated/cooled rooms.
79. Electric clothes dryers can be expensive to run so hang clothes out to dry wherever possible.
80. Use energy 'star' ratings to help choose efficient electrical appliances. 1 star is the least efficient and 6 stars is the most.

### **Making more of your food dollar**

When we are budgeting and money is short, it is important to have priorities. One of the worst things that could happen to you would be to become sick. When times are difficult it is vital to remain fit and healthy. The best way to do this is by choosing the correct food to maintain a healthy diet.

81. Eat as wide a variety of foods from the basic food groups as possible. These food groups include: bread/cereals (for example, bread, rice, pasta, cereals), meat (for example, red meat, poultry, fish fresh eggs, beans legumes and nuts), dairy (for example, milk, custard yoghurt cheese), fruit/vegetables (including fresh, dried, canned and juices). Stick to the basics—bread and milk before biscuits and fruit juice, and cut back on fat, sugar, salt and alcohol.
82. Plan meals for their food value and cost. Meals you have to prepare yourself are cheaper and better for you.
83. Take-away meals and pre-packaged foods can be very expensive. Instead, you could cook a larger amount of your own food and freeze it for later enjoyment.
84. Have a shopping list and buy only what is on it. Spend time planning the list and your meals so that it covers all of your needs for that week.
85. Don't shop when you are hungry as this can lead to the impulse purchase of something you may not be interested in later.
86. Specials at the end of the aisle are designed for you to add to your shopping. Beware, as they are not always healthy to consume or a part of a healthy food budget. Study the 'specials' and make sure that they truly are genuine (try checking the original cost under the sales price leaflet to check how much you are really saving).
87. Buying in bulk can be a good way to save money, but make sure that you can store and use the goods before they go off, or share the costs and food with friends or family.
88. Use 'junk mail' to shop around. Make the most of specials for healthy foods when they are available.
89. Some foods can be bought in cheaper packaging. For example, buy herbs in cellophane bags rather than glass bottles.
90. Store brands, no name and no frills products can save you a lot of money. Many are just as good as name brands.
91. Compare the cost of different forms of food – fresh, canned and frozen. 92. In supermarkets, the brightly lit expensive items are generally at eye level on the shelf. Look at the top and bottom of the shelves, which is where the bargains are.
93. Powdered milk can be a good alternative to fresh milk. It can be cheaper and easier to store as well as simple to cook with.



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94. Meat is the most expensive item on your shopping list. Try to use less expensive cuts of meat. Stretch meat dishes with rice and potatoes and also use beans and legumes such as lentils or chickpeas in casseroles, patties or pasta sauce.
95. You can get bargains on food if it is close to its 'use by' date. If you do buy this food however, make sure that you can use it before the date expires. With your friends, keep your ears open for deals and specials and inform each other of anything you find.
96. If you can get to a market type food area, fresh fruit and vegetables are often cheaper to purchase, especially towards the end of the day when they want to get rid of excess stock. When they are in season, they have the best flavour and are the lowest price.
97. Experiment with the day and time that you shop as some stores have specials on different days and times in the week.
98. You may also be able to purchase food slightly cheaper at food co-operatives.

### **Cheaper cleaning around the house**

99. Clean windows with methylated spirits or vinegar and newspapers.
100. Clean bathroom and kitchen sinks and bench-tops using bicarbonate of soda and white vinegar.

**DISCLAIMER:** The information provided in this information sheet is of a general nature only, and is not intended to be legal advice. There may be errors or inaccuracies or the information may not be completely up-to-date. Always check the information provided before relying on it. The information relates to consumer law in New South Wales, Australia.