

50 Great Tips For Saving Money For Those Just Getting Started

(Taken from the Article "100 Great Tips For Saving Money For Those Just Getting Started") from www.thesimpledollar.com

- 1. Master the thirty day rule.** Whenever you're considering making an unnecessary purchase, wait thirty days and then ask yourself if you still want that item. Quite often, you'll find that the urge to buy has passed and you'll have saved yourself some money by simply waiting. If you want, you can even keep a "thirty day list" where you write down the item and the day you'll reconsider it, but I prefer just to keep this one in my head - that way, I often just forget about the unimportant things.
- 2. Write a list before you go shopping - and stick to it.** One should *never* go into a store without a strong idea of what one will be buying while in there. Make a careful plan of what you'll buy before you go, then stick strictly to that list when you go to the store. Don't put anything in the cart that's not on the list, no matter how tempting, and you'll come out of the store saving a bundle.
- 3. Invite friends over instead of going out.** Almost every activity at home is less expensive than going out. Invite some friends over and have a cookout or a potluck meal and enjoy their company. Everyone will have fun, the cost will be low, and the others will likely reciprocate not long afterwards.
- 4. Make your own gifts instead of buying stuff from the store.** You can make food mixes, candles, bread, cookies, soap, and all kinds of other things at home quite easily and inexpensively. These make spectacular gifts for others because they involve your homemade touch, plus quite often they're consumable, meaning they don't wind up filling someone's closet with junk. Even better - include a personal handwritten note with the gift. This will make it even more special than anything you could possibly buy down at the mall, plus it saves you money.
- 5. Call your credit card company and ask for a rate reduction.** Take any of your credit cards that are carrying a balance, flip them over, and call the number on the back. Tell them that you want an interest rate reduction or you'll take your business elsewhere. If the first person you talk to won't do it, ask to talk to a supervisor. If you have a \$5,000 balance, even a 3% rate reduction saves you \$150 a year.
- 6. Clean out your closet.** Go through your closets and try to get rid of some of the stuff in there. You can have a yard sale with it, take it to a consignment shop, or even donate it for the tax deduction - all of which turn old stuff you don't want to use any more into money in your pocket. Not only that, it's often a psychological load off your mind to clean out your closets.
- 7. Drink more water.** Not only does drinking plenty of water have great health benefits, [water drinking has financial benefits, too](#). Drink a big glass of water before each meal, and not only will you digest it better, you won't eat as much, saving on the ol' food bill. You'll also find yourself feeling a bit better as you begin to get adequately hydrated (most Americans are perpetually somewhat dehydrated).
- 8. Cut back on the convenience foods - fast foods, microwave meals, and so on.** Instead of eating fast food or just nuking some prepackaged food when you get home, try [making some simple and healthy replacements](#) that you can take with you. An hour's worth of preparation one weekend can give you a ton of cheap and handy meals that will end up saving you a *lot* of cash and not eat into your time when you're busy.
- 9. Make [a quadruple batch of a casserole](#).** Casseroles are nice, easy dishes to prepare, but on busy nights, it's often still easier to just order some take-out or eat out or just plop a prepackaged meal in the oven. Instead, the next time you make a casserole, make *four* batches of it and put the other three in the freezer. Then, the next time you need a quick meal for the family, grab one of those batches and just heat it up - easy as can be. Even better, doing this allows you to buy the ingredients in bulk, making each casserole cheaper than it would be ordinarily - and far, far cheaper than eating out or trying a prepackaged meal.
- 10. Be diligent about turning off lights before you leave.** If you spend one minute turning off lights before a two hour trip, that's [the equivalent of earning \\$50 an hour](#). That's some impressive savings, particularly if you do it before longer trips. The key is to *use less energy*, particularly when you're not using the device.
- 11. Install CFL (compact fluorescent light bulbs, or, even better, LED) bulbs wherever it makes sense.** These bulbs might cost more initially, but they both have a longer life than normal incandescent bulbs and they both eat far less electricity. CFLs tend to use about 25% of the electricity of an incandescent - LEDs use about 2%. CFLs are cheaper than LEDs right now and produce better light, but not quite as good as incandescent bulbs. My policy? Put LEDs in closets and out of the way places, use CFLs for hall and some room lighting, and use incandescent bulbs (until the other bulbs get better) where you read and do other eye-intensive activities. This will trim a significant amount from your electric bill.

- 12. Install a programmable thermostat.** These devices regulate the temperature in your house automatically according to the schedule that you set. Thus, when you're not home, it allows the heating or cooling to turn off for several hours, saving you on your energy bill. A programmable thermostat can easily cut your energy bill by 10 to 20%.
- 13. Buy appliances based on reliability, not what's cheapest at the store.** It's worth the time to do a bit of research when you buy a new appliance. A reliable, energy efficient washer and dryer might cost you quite a bit now, but if it continually saves you energy and lasts for fifteen years, you'll save *significant* money in the long run. When you need to buy an appliance, research it - start with back issues of Consumer Reports at the library. An hour's worth of research can easily save you hundreds of dollars.
- 14. Hide your credit cards.** Take your credit cards and put them in a safe place in your home, *not* in your wallet where it's easy to spend them. If you argue that you need it for "emergencies," just be sure to keep a small amount of cash hidden in your wallet for these emergencies. Don't keep plastic on you until you have the willpower to not use it even when you're sorely tempted.
- 15. Plan your meals around your grocery store's flyer.** Instead of just planning your meals based on a cookbook or whatever you can dream up, plan all your meals around what's on sale in your grocery store's flyer. Look at the biggest sales, then plan meals based on those ingredients and what you have on hand, and you'll find yourself with a much smaller food bill than you're used to.
- 16. Do a price comparison - and find a cheaper grocery store.** Most of us get in a routine of shopping at the same grocery store, even though quite often it's not the one that offers the best deals on our most common purchases. Fortunately, [there's a simple way to find the cheapest store around](#). Just keep track of the twenty or so things you buy most often, then shop for these items at a variety of stores. Eventually, one store will come out on top for your purchases - just make that one your regular shopping destination and you'll automatically save money.
- 17. Do a "maintenance run" on your appliances.** Check them to make sure there isn't any dust clogging them and that they're fairly clean. Look behind the appliances, and use your vacuum to gently clear away dust. Check all of the vents, especially on refrigerators, dryers, and heating and cooling units. The less dust you have blocking the mechanics of these devices, the more efficiently they'll run (saving you on your energy bill) and the longer they'll last (saving you on replacement costs).
- 18. Cancel unused club memberships.** Are you paying dues at a club that you never use? Like, for instance, a gym membership? Cancel these club memberships, even if you think you *might* use them again someday - you can always renew the membership at a later date if it turns out that you actually do miss it.
- 19. When shopping for standard items (clothes, sports equipment, older games, etc.), start by shopping used.** Quite often, you can find the exact item you want with a bit of clever shopping at used equipment stores, used game stores, consignment shops, and so on. Just make these shops a part of your normal routine - go there first when looking for potential items and you *will* save money.
- 20. Keep your hands clean.** This one's simple - just [wash your hands thoroughly each time you use the bathroom](#) or handle raw foods. You'll keep yourself from acquiring all kinds of viruses and bacteria, saving you on medical bills and medicine costs and lost productivity. That's not to say you shouldn't explore the world and get your hands dirty sometimes - that's good for you, too - but basic sanitation does help keep the medical bills away.
- 21. Give a gift of a service instead of an item.** For new parents, give an evening of babysitting as a gift. If you know pet owners, offer to take care of their pets when they travel. Offer up some lawn care as a gift to a new homeowner. These are always spectacular gifts for anyone - I know that, as a parent of a toddler and an infant, I *love* receiving a babysitting gift, probably more than any "stuff" I might receive.
- 22. Do holiday shopping right after the holidays.** Most people [use this technique for Christmas](#), but it works for every holiday. Wait until about two days after a holiday, then go out shopping for items you need that are themed for that day. Get a Mother's Day card for next year the day after Mother's Day. Get Easter egg decorating kits the day after Easter. Get wrapping paper and cards and such the day after Christmas. The discounts are tremendous, and you can just put this stuff in the closet until next year, saving you a bundle.
- 23. Join up with a volunteer program.** It's a great way to meet new people, get some exercise, and involve yourself in a positive project that can lift your spirit. It also comes without a cost to you and can provide a lot of entertainment and a fulfilling day when you're in the right mindset. I've come to spend more and more of my time volunteering, serving on various committees and groups in the community - and it's the best thing I've ever done.

24. Reevaluate the stuff in the rooms in your house. Go into a room and go through every single item in it. Do you really need that item? Are you happy that it's there, or would you be just fine if it were not? If you can find stuff to get rid of, get rid of it - it just creates clutter and it might have some value to others. You also improve the perceived value of your house - and you're likely to get a lot of cleaning done in the process. It's a frugal win-win-win.

25. Try generic brands of items you buy regularly. Instead of just picking up the ordinary brand of an item you buy, try out the store brand or generic version of the item. Likely, you'll save a few cents now, but you'll also likely discover that the store brand is just as good as the name brand - the only difference between the two, often, is the marketing. Once you're on board the generic train, you'll find your regular grocery bill getting smaller and smaller.

26. Prepare some meals at home. Get an accessible and easy-to-use cookbook (my favorite "beginner" cookbook is Mark Bittman's excellent [How to Cook Everything](#)) and try making some of the dishes inside. You'll find that cooking at home is much easier than you think - and way cheaper and healthier than take-out or dining out. Even better, you can [easily prepare meals in advance](#) - even handy [fast food type meals](#).

27. Go for reliability and fuel efficiency when buying a car. A reliable and fuel efficient car will save you thousands over the long haul. Let's say you drive a vehicle for 80,000 miles. If you choose a 25 miles per gallon car over a 15 miles per gallon car, you save 2,133 gallons of gas. At \$3 a gallon, that's \$6,400 in savings right there. Reliability can pay the same dividends. Do the research - it will pay off for you.

28. Don't go to stores or shopping centers for entertainment. Doing so is just an encouragement to spend money you don't really have on stuff you don't really need. Instead, find other places to entertain yourself - the park, the basketball court, a museum, a friend's house, or even in your own home. Don't substitute shopping for entertainment and you'll be way better off.

29. Master [the ten second rule](#). Whenever you pick up an item in order to add it to your cart or to take it to the checkout, stop for ten seconds and ask yourself *why* you're buying it and whether you actually *need* it or not. If you can't find a good answer, put the item back. This keeps me from making impulse buys on a regular basis.

30. Eat breakfast. Eating a healthy breakfast fills you up with energy for the day and also decreases your desire to eat a big lunch in the middle of the day. Not only that, [breakfast can be very healthy, quick, and inexpensive](#). A bowl of oatmeal in the morning is often the one thing that keeps me from running out to eat an expensive lunch later in the day - and it keeps me peppy and full of energy for the entire morning instead of in a coffee-laced daze.

31. Go through your clothes - all of them. If you have a regular urge to buy clothes, go through *everything* that you have and see what you might find. Take the clothes at the back of the closet and bring them to the front and suddenly your wardrobe will feel completely different. Take the clothes buried in your dresser and pull them to the top. You'll feel like a brand new person who doesn't need to spend money on clothes right now.

32. Brown bag your lunch. Instead of going out to eat at work, take your own lunch. Lots of people think that this means "nasty lunch," but it doesn't. With [some thoughtful preparation and just a few minutes of time](#), you can create something quite enjoyable for your brown bag lunch - and save a fistful of cash each day, too.

33. Learn how to dress minimally. Buy clothes that mix and match well and you'll not need nearly as many clothes. If you have five pants, seven shirts, and seven ties that all go together, you have almost an endless wardrobe right there just by mixing and matching. This is exactly what I do in order to minimize clothes buying and still look professional - I just mix and remix what I wear by using utilitarian clothes options to begin with.

34. If something's broken, give a fair shot at repairing it yourself before replacing it or calling a repairman. Get a handyman's book or advice from the internet and give it a shot yourself. I've fixed clocks, air conditioners, and VCRs by doing this before, saving significant cash by saving on a replacement or on a repair person.

35. Check out what your town's parks and recreation board has to offer. My town has several wonderful parks, free basketball and tennis courts, free disc golf, trails, and lots of other stuff just there waiting to be used. You can go have fun for hours out in the wonderful outdoors, playing sports, hiking on trails, or trying other activities - and it's all there for free. All you have to do is discover it.

36. Dig into your community calendar. There are often tons of free events going on in your town that you don't even know about. Stop by the local library or by city hall and ask how you can get a hold of [a listing of upcoming community events](#), and make an effort to hit the interesting ones. You can often get free meals, free entertainment, and free stuff just by paying attention - even better, you'll get in touch with what's going on around you.

37. Get a crock pot. A crock pot is perhaps [the best deal on earth for reducing cooking costs in a busy family](#). You can just dump in your ingredients before work, put it on simmer, and *dinner is done* when you get home. There are countless recipes out there for all variety of foods, and every time you cook this way, you're saving money as compared to eating out.

38. Do some [basic home and auto maintenance on a regular schedule](#). Instead of just waiting until something breaks to deal with it, develop a monthly maintenance schedule where you go around your home (and your car) and perform a bit of maintenance where it's needed. This little activity, taking you just an hour or two a month, will keep things from breaking down and help you see problems before they become disasters.

39. Pack food before you go on a road trip. Have everyone pack a sack lunch for the trip. That way, instead of stopping in the middle of the trip, driving around looking for a place to eat, spending a bunch of time there, and then paying a hefty bill, you can just eat on the road or, better yet, stop at a nice park and stretch for a bit. Plus, you'll save a lot of money and a fair amount of time this way.

40. Go through your cell phone bill, look for services you don't use, and ditch them. Sit down and go through each item on your bill and see if there's anything there that you don't use, like a surfeit of text messages or web access or something to that effect. Then call your cell phone company and ask to have those services eliminated. Boom, you're saving money.

41. Hit the library - *hard*. Don't look at a library as just a place to get old books. Look at it as a [free place to do all sorts of things](#). I've used it to learn a foreign language, meet people, use the Internet anonymously, check out movies and CDs, grab local free newspapers, and keep up on community events. Best of all, it doesn't cost a dime

42. Find daily inspiration for making intelligent moves. I'm usually inspired by my children. Perhaps you're inspired to make changes by your spouse - or even by someone in the community you respect. Maybe it's just a personal goal, like an early retirement. Find something that makes you *want* to make positive changes, then use that person or thing as a constant reminder. Keep a picture of it in your wallet, in your vehicle, and on your bathroom mirror. Keep it in your mind as much as you possibly can.

43. Find out about *all* of the benefits of your job. Most people aren't even aware of all of the benefits available to them. Spend some time with an HR person finding out about [all the benefits of your job](#) - you might be surprised at what you might find. I found free tickets to sporting events, free personal improvement opportunities, and an optional employee match on some retirement funds that maximized the money I was socking away. This not only cut down on my own spending on things like sporting and community events and educational classes, but also improved my retirement plan.

44. Don't speed. Not only is it inefficient in terms of gasoline usage, it also can get you pulled over and cost you a bundle, as [I discovered a while back](#). It's highly cost-efficient to just drive the speed limit, keep that gas in the tank, and keeps you out of trouble.

45. Drive a different route to work. This is an especially powerful tip if you find yourself "automatically" stopping for something on the way into work or the way home. Get rid of that constant drain by [selecting a different route that doesn't go by the temptation](#), even if the new route is a bit longer. You'll still be time ahead (because you're not stopping) and you'll definitely be money ahead.

46. Eat less meat. For the nutritional value, meat is very expensive, especially as compared to vegetables and fruits. Simply change around your regular meal proportions to include more fruits and vegetables and less meats - eat a smaller steak and a bigger helping of green beans, for example. Not only is this a healthier way to eat (saving on health costs), it's also less expensive.

47. Make sure all your electrical devices are on a surge protector. This is especially true of your entertainment center and your computer equipment. A power surge can damage these electronics very easily, so spend the money for a basic surge protector and keep your equipment plugged into such a device.

48. Utilize online bill pay with your bank. This serves two purposes. First, it keeps you in much closer contact with your money, as you can keep a very close eye on your balance and be in much less danger of overdrafting. Second, it saves you money on stamps and paper checks by allowing you to just fill in an online form, click submit, and have your bill paid. Try it out - and take advantage of it if you're not already.

49. Buy staples in bulk. We buy items we use a lot of in bulk, particularly items that don't perish - trash bags, laundry detergent, diapers, and so on are purchased in the largest amounts possible. This cuts down on their cost per usage by quite a bit and, over the long haul, begins to add up to some serious money. Even better, we don't have to shop for these items very often, saving time and a fraction of the cost of a trip to the grocery store.

50. Never give up. Whenever the struggle against debt feels like it's too much, go read a personal finance blog and remember that there are a lot of people out there fighting the same fight. Read around through various articles on websites and learn some new things - and perhaps get inspired to keep going, no matter what.