



Cook at Home and Save

When you have an active, busy life, it may be tempting to rely on takeout or ready-to-go meals. However, making your own meals will benefit both your wallet and your waistline. If you are looking for ways to get the most out of your food budget, try these tips:

- ▶ **Eat fresh.** You don't actually have to "cook" to make your own meals. Mix and match greens and a variety of other vegetables to create quick and easy meals. Fresh vegetables can also be frozen for later use in soups or stews.
- ▶ **Cook with what's in season.** Prices on many foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, may vary throughout the year. Anything that is in season should be less expensive. Stop by your local farmers market for the best deals on the freshest produce.
- ▶ **Make a meal plan.** Mapping out your meals for the week will help you determine what ingredients should be on your grocery list. This will help decrease food waste and limit overspending at the store.
- ▶ **Buy meat in bulk.** A large package of chicken breasts can be split into smaller portions, frozen, and cooked later. The same is true for fish and other meats. A lower-cost roast in the slow cooker with lots of vegetables will also yield multiple portions. Eliminating meat from your diet one or two days a week is another way to save.
- ▶ **Avoid food waste.** Rotating canned and frozen foods could save you hundreds of dollars a year. Start by taking an inventory of what is in your refrigerator, freezer, and pantry. Then, create meal plans based on what you have in house.

Contact LifeMatters for ideas on how to create or manage your food budget. You can also access healthy recipes on mylifematters.com.



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Realistic Optimism

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? While many people consider these the only two filters by which to see the world, there is a third, more practical approach, known as “realistic optimism.”

Realistic optimists take a clear-eyed view of circumstances and challenges. Instead of assuming that everything will simply work out in the end, realistic optimists address problems head-on and work to overcome difficulties using a practical, solution-focused approach.

If your worldview could benefit from a dose of realistic optimism, try these tips:

- ▶ **Take action.** Break a problem or goal into steps. While focusing on one step at a time may feel more productive, there may be situations where you must chip away at multiple steps simultaneously. The key is to maintain momentum and keep moving forward.



- ▶ **Give your best effort.** If you define success as achieving a goal with no room for any other possible outcome, you may be disappointed, particularly in competitive situations. Instead, focus on giving your best effort and learning all you can along the way.
- ▶ **Let go.** While you can control your own planning and effort, you can't control the actions of others or unforeseen circumstances, such as disasters, injury, illness, or financial challenges. Accepting that some things are beyond your control may help you adapt to and rebound from setbacks.
- ▶ **Look for alternatives.** If it appears that your initial plan will not succeed, consider pivoting to a backup plan or reworking your goal. Stay open to opportunities.
- ▶ **Ask why.** Realistic optimists aren't afraid to take a step back and consider if they are still on the right path. This helps them adapt more effectively to changing circumstances. It also allows them to grow in new directions rather than fixating on one specific outcome.

By tempering your positive outlook with a dose of realistic optimism, you may feel more contented with where life's journey takes you. To learn more, contact LifeMatters.

Dollars & Sense: Emergency Expenses

While it's best to save for large expenses, emergencies happen. Unplanned health care visits, car or home repairs, or other unexpected needs may upend your budget.

In these situations, it's important to look at your options for covering these costs in manageable ways to avoid high-interest debt. Consider these options:

- ▶ **Financing or payments.** Committing to provider financing or a payment plan (if available) may help you obtain needed services or repairs without straining your budget or racking up credit card debt. You could also talk to your bank or credit union about taking out a personal loan or other financing options.
- ▶ **Review your budget.** Look for ways to divert money toward paying off this unexpected expense. Consider if you could pick up extra cash by doing odd jobs or selling crafts or creative work.

- ▶ **Access employer benefits.** Your employer may offer helpful resources beyond what is available through LifeMatters. Talk to your HR department.
- ▶ **Have a yard sale (in person or virtual).** Set up a display in your driveway, post some signs around the neighborhood, and see how much clutter you can clear away. Getting rid of unwanted furniture, clothing, household items, decorations, sports gear, and used books, CDs, or DVDs could help you raise cash



fast. If you prefer to sell online, use a legitimate reseller service.

- ▶ **Pawn items of value.** Items that fetch a good price at a pawn shop include jewelry, electronics, musical instruments, hunting and fishing gear, tools, and lawn equipment. It's best to sell the item outright and take the cash rather than accepting a loan that will accrue interest.
- ▶ **Friends and family.** Though it may be difficult to ask, setting up a crowdfund to cover medical or funeral expenses may help you through a rough patch.
- ▶ **Public assistance.** If the situation is dire or you have little in the way of assets, you may qualify for public assistance, such as food pantries or utility bill relief. In addition, some community programs may offer help with medical bills or funeral expenses. Explore local resources and, if eligible, apply as soon as possible.

The LifeMatters Financial Consultation Service can help you figure out how to cover an emergency expense. Call anytime.

Pay Down Holiday Debt

Did you go overboard with holiday spending this year? If you are now carrying too much credit card debt, here are ways to dig yourself out:

▶ **Add up seasonal costs.**

Calculate the exact amount of holiday-related debt to determine the target number for your repayment plan. This will also help you establish a budget for next year's holiday season spending.

- ▶ **Pay off higher-interest debt first.** List all your debt by interest rate. Make minimum payments on the lower interest debt and put as much extra money as you can onto the balance with the highest interest rate. Reducing the amount of interest you pay will decrease your total debt more quickly.



- ▶ **Rework your budget.** Determine where you can cut costs and divert more money into debt repayment. Small cuts to discretionary spending (such as making coffee at home) will make a big difference over time.

- ▶ **Look for extra income.** Consider ways to make extra cash. Yard work, handyman or odd jobs, or babysitting could help you pay off debt faster. If you craft or have a creative hobby, consider taking commissions or setting up an online store.

- ▶ **Shop smart.** Access discount programs at the stores you shop at the most. Purchase items you are most likely to need when on sale and buy in bulk if possible. In addition, consider buying holiday cards or decorations on clearance after the holidays.

- ▶ **Live within your means.** Reaching for a credit card when you want something may leave you in a perpetual cycle of debt. Focus on creating a budget that allows for both saving and discretionary spending.

- ▶ **Start a savings fund.** If you want to avoid being in the same position next year, try creating a separate savings account specifically for holiday expenses. Small deposits here and there could make a big difference when next year's holiday bills come due.

Whether you want to pay off holiday debt or set a budget for next year, LifeMatters can help. Call today.

Source: Balance

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