

# Christmas & Money



**Credit Canada**  
Debt Solutions



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# Have a Financially Sane Christmas

It's once again that time of year to start on that Christmas gift giving list, if you haven't already. It's a good idea to begin with a review of last year's list, and a serious look for ways to cut your spending. In this booklet you will find helpful hints on how to reduce the cost of Christmas.

As you review your budget this Christmas, keep in mind that gift giving is not the only way we can be generous with spreading holiday cheer. Look again at your gift list. Would someone with small children enjoy an evening of free baby-sitting? An elderly relative may really appreciate having a room painted, a garage cleared or a handmade coupon book redeemable throughout the spring and summer months for yard work. Use the time you would have spent shopping for a gift for someone on your list to their real benefit.

Contemplate ways you can be generous with your time. No finer gift can be given than heartfelt thoughtfulness. To give our time exemplifies the true spirit of holiday gift giving.

So take some time to review your finances and carefully plan a financially sane Christmas. Read on further for more cost cutting ideas.

## Your holiday values.

Read and prioritize the following value statements. Cross off those that have no importance for you and add any equally important ones that are not included. Remember, there are no right and wrong answers.

Suggestion: Do this with your family and significant others. First have everyone fill out one of these forms. Then gather and discuss what you have written. Use this information to formulate a holiday plan that addresses, as much as possible, each person's needs and desires.

Rank the importance of each one to you. Use 1 as the most important.

The holiday season is a time:

- \_\_\_\_\_ to be a peacemaker in the world at large.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to be a peacemaker in the family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to enjoy being with family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to strengthen bonds with my family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to exchange gifts with my family and friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ for parties, entertaining and visits with friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to help those who are less fortunate.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to create a beautiful home environment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to strengthen ties to the religious community.
- \_\_\_\_\_ for relaxation and renewal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ to celebrate the birth of Christ (Christmas).
- \_\_\_\_\_ to celebrate the survival of the Jews (Hanukkah).
- \_\_\_\_\_ to celebrate an African American tradition (Kwanza).
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

Based on *Unplug the Christmas Machine* (Robinson and Staeheli) William Morrow. New York 1982.

# Holiday Stress

## "Bah! Humbug!"

Do you ever want to say "Bah! Humbug!" at holiday time? Below are a few points to remember as you go through the holiday season. There may be some valid reason you feel "blue" this time of year. Think about these points, they may help explain why you may not be in the "holiday mood".

### High hopes.

We, and especially children, have high hopes and expectations around the holidays. Kids may be overstimulated.

### Childhood memories of the season.

Wasn't it more fun when we were kids? We just didn't realize how much preparation was involved.

### The advertising hype.

Are you pressured to buy?

### Family demands.

Family and relationships can be strained this time of year.

### Personal events.

You may be away from family this year. Or personal events have shadowed your outlook.

Whatever the reason, try to remember what the season is all about and spend as much time as you can with family and friends.

## Get a jump start.

As much as we may not like to admit it, holidays can be a very stressful time. By getting a jump start on your holiday planning, you can have a financially sane holiday season.

### End of October.

Start watching for sales at the grocery store. Buy things on sale and put them in the freezer. Most items will keep for several months.

### First week of November.

Set a spending limit for yourself. Look through your financial statements and decide how much you can realistically spend. Start looking for gift ideas in catalogues. Items will take six weeks to arrive. Also, start notebook recording all the money you have spent. It is easy to get caught in the holiday spirit and give until you are broke.

### Second week of November.

Take stock of your decorations. Can you save money making things? Visit church bazaars for ideas. Making holiday decorations is fun and cheap but you need to start early.

### Third week of November.

Wrap and mail out of town packages. This is the busiest time of the year for the post office and it may take three weeks for a package to arrive at its destination.

### First week of December.

It is time to start thinking about holiday wardrobes. Do things need to be bought for the children? Do you have clothes that need dry cleaning? By starting early, you can comparison shop and look for better deals. Guaranteed, if you wait until the week before Christmas to buy Christmas outfits, you will spend more money.

### Second week of December.

Wrap all your gifts (with the wrapping you bought last year in the after Christmas sales, of course). If you run out of wrapping paper, the comics from the newspaper make excellent wrapping paper for kids.

### Third week of December.

Make a list of all the people you need to call for the holidays. Take advantage of discount calling times.

### Christmas week.

Keep a list of all gifts received so that you have an easier time writing thank-you notes.

### Week after Christmas.

As hard as it may be, scope out the after Christmas sales. You can find decorations as much as 80% off the regular price.

# Tips to Avoid Overspending

## Credit cards.

Carry only one or two credit cards with you. Otherwise you may think you're not spending much because the total on each card is fairly small.

Wrap each credit card in a piece of paper. Each time you use the card, write down the amount. Keep a running total. Compare the figure to your holiday budget.

Before you buy on credit ask yourself, "would I buy it if I had to pay cash?" (If you don't pay the bills in full, normal price with cash is less than on sale on credit.)

Use a low rate Visa or Master Card instead of a higher rate retail card if you don't pay off your balances in full each month.

Beware of deferred payment plans. Finance charges may accrue during the deferred payment period that can double the cost of your purchase over a long enough period of time. If you can't afford it now, you probably can't afford it three months from now.

Avoid credit card scams. Destroy carbons, check billing statements, be careful about giving out credit card numbers over the phone, and keep your card in view to avoid extra imprints being made.

## Shopping.

Keep a shopping diary during the holidays. Note when you buy and what mood triggered your purchase. We tend to overspend when we are tired, angry or nostalgic.

Don't push yourself to finish shopping if you're tired. When you're exhausted you are inclined to buy almost anything – even if it's expensive.

Limit the number of gifts to children. Learn to say "no" to your children. Parents need to learn not to feel guilty by saying "no." Set up a budget with your children to teach them that money is not infinite.

Re-examine purchases before buying and put back the ones that aren't on your list or are too expensive.

Look at how you justify charges. Do you really need a new holiday outfit when last year's might do?

Separate shopping trips (compare prices, quality) from spending trips (making a purchase).

Ask when items of interest at a store are going on sale. Liquidators, buying clubs, and factory outlet stores usually offer lower prices.

At sales, pick up "general" presents that can be given to anyone; a basket, vase, bowl or even gourmet jam. Then you won't overspend in a last minute panic.

## Wrapping.

Save money gift wrapping by using reusable gift boxes, newspaper comics or store shopping bags. If you have access to a shredder fill gift bags with coloured paper which has been shredded.

Wrap your holiday gift boxes like they do on TV. Wrap the top and bottom separately. Because the lids simply lift off, the boxes may be reused.

Invest in gift "sacks" which can be reused. Paper holiday tablecloths are also good for wrapping large gifts.

Buy holiday wrapping and cards after the holidays for next year. You'll save more than 50%.

## Traditions.

Replace gifts with lots of holiday traditions.

- Make decorations for the house and Christmas tree.
- Visit free holiday displays around your town.
- Attend a holiday concert/ballet or go caroling.
- Read/watch a weekly holiday story/program.
- Donate your time, food and/or goods to a charity.

# Holidays on a Budget

## Good gift ideas for kids, for not a lot of green.

1. Limit the number of "money" gifts to children. For instance, one big gift, say \$30 per child.
2. Visit thrift stores like Salvation Army or Goodwill. Many toys there just need a good cleaning, small repair or a bit of paint and cost a few dollars.
3. While you're there, how about a "dress up" box for small children. "Funky" dresses, uniforms of all kinds, doctor/nurse garb, hats, jewelry, etc., can be bought for fifty cents or a dollar each. Decorate a big cardboard box, fill with above treasures and you have a great gift.
4. Swap toys with friends. Their kids are probably tired of their toys and vice versa, so swap and wrap them.
5. Draw a picture of a special activity you will do with your children a few days after Christmas, like roller skating or taking them to McDonald's. Wrap it up and put it under the tree.
6. What kid wouldn't love this: A coupon saying you will clean their room on demand. The next time you nag them about cleaning their room, they can hand you the coupon. Then you have to clean their room!

## Low-cost or no-cost gifts.

1. Bake a homemade dish or sauce.
2. Sew clothes, quilts, draperies.
3. Make crafts (evergreen trimmings, collage of favorite photos, needlepoint or Christmas stockings).
4. Donate time transporting seniors and the ill (trips to the store, doctor's office, going out to eat).
5. Refurbish old toys, furniture, cars.

6. Give up a valued possession which is yours.
7. Potted plants/fruits from your yard.
8. Give your services, manicure, massage, cut hair, yard duty, clean house, wash car or pet, prepare a meal, baby-sitting, car pooling.
9. Coupons for dinner out, movies, sports.
10. Forgive a monetary debt owed to you.
11. Package of favorite recipes (quick dinner ideas for working mother/dad or low-salt recipes for high blood pressure).
12. Collection of coupons for favorite products.
13. Coupon book for kids (no-penalty for not cleaning their room or coupons for playing games with parents).
14. Copy a favorite poem on fancy writing paper.
15. Tape-record a conversation with your children (send tape to far away grandparents).
16. Frame one of your child's drawings (send to relatives).
17. Make a certificate saying recipient understands true meaning of Christmas (you promise to work a certain number of hours for a charity in their honour).
18. Large families can draw names or gift-sharing (go in together to buy a gift).
19. Give Canada Savings Bonds (they encourage savings).
20. Exchange Christmas cards instead of gifts.

# Christmas Inventory

## Finances.

In addition to the obvious expense of gift giving, there are many hidden costs to Christmas. This list will help bring them to your attention.

1. Put an amount beside your customary holiday expenses.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Amount allocated
- \_\_\_\_\_ Buying gifts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Craft supplies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gift wrapping expense
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mailing gifts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Higher phone bills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extra dry cleaning
- \_\_\_\_\_ Paying for services such as house cleaning, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Higher food bills
- \_\_\_\_\_ Travel expenses
- \_\_\_\_\_ Loss of paid work hours
- \_\_\_\_\_ Extra linen, bedding, etc., for company
- \_\_\_\_\_ Higher entertainment costs (movies, DVDs, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Decorations for the house
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tree and other greenery
- \_\_\_\_\_ Candies
- \_\_\_\_\_ Christmas cards
- \_\_\_\_\_ Postage stamps
- \_\_\_\_\_ Liquor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Catering
- \_\_\_\_\_ Flowers
- \_\_\_\_\_ New holiday clothes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Holiday tipping
- \_\_\_\_\_ Donations to charities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other
- \_\_\_\_\_ Total

2. Estimate how much you or your family spent on all of the above expenses last year. \$ \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you ordinarily stick to a holiday budget?
4. If you are married, is there clear communication about holiday spending between you and your spouse?
5. Who makes most of the holiday purchases?

## Refunds and exchanges.

Just because your sister already has the CD you bought her for Christmas doesn't mean you can return it for a refund. Stores do not have to give you a refund or exchange. Basically if you've bought it, you own it.

Retailers can set their own policies whether it be absolutely no refund or exchange, full cash refund with no restrictions or only exchange within ten days.

Most stores have some kind of policy when it comes to returned goods and many post their policy in the store at the cash register or on the sales slip. But, it is up to the shopper to find out what the policy is if it is not posted.

### Tips on refunds.

- Be careful when shopping for gifts and make sure you keep all receipts.
- Ask if the store gives cash refunds or a credit or exchange.
- Are there any items on which there are no refunds such as lingerie or bathing suits?
- Does the refund policy include goods on sale?
- What condition does merchandise have to be in? Unopened, opened but not used, slightly used or worn with use?
- Is there a time limit on when you can return the item?

# Christmas Inventory

## Tips to make Christmas shopping easier.

- Shop during off-hours, midweek.
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothes.
- Decide in advance on your gift budget and stick to it.
- Coupon clipping and sale shopping can save big bucks. Keep your eyes on newspaper advertisements and flyers for gift ideas.
- Start your shopping as early as possible. Nearly half of shoppers wait for pre-Christmas sales before shopping.
- Wrap presents as you buy them to avoid the burden of last minute wrapping.

- Use gift bags which can be purchased dirt cheap at Dollar stores and they can be recycled and reused over and over.
- Comparison shop. By going to several stores and looking at prices, guarantees and service agreements you may find the best value.
- Avoid impulse buying. Do you really need that item? Can you afford it? Is it the best price?
- Shop at reputable stores. Ask friends where they buy specific items.
- Examine merchandise carefully. Try on clothing to make sure it fits. Ask for appliance demonstrations.
- Don't forget to fill in and mail warranty cards.
- Be skeptical of extravagant sales claims. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

## Christmas shopping list.

Person	Gift	Amount

Make sure you stick to your spending limit on each individual. Look through your budget and decide if the limits you have on each person are realistic.

# Creating a Christmas Plan

## My first goal for the coming celebration.

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To make this goal a reality, I am going to:

Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3. \_\_\_\_\_

## My second goal for the coming celebration.

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To make this goal a reality, I am going to:

Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3. \_\_\_\_\_

## My third goal for the coming celebration.

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To make this goal a reality, I am going to:

Objective 1. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 2. \_\_\_\_\_

Objective 3. \_\_\_\_\_

# Are You Facing Credit Difficulties?

If for any reason you cannot meet your payment obligations to any of your creditors, contact the creditor immediately and discuss your problems candidly. Creditors are flexible when changes in your life make repayment of your obligations difficult, but you must make them aware of your situation. Do not try to avoid your creditors. It will just make the situation worse.

If you find that your ability to deal with your creditors directly has become impossible, or you cannot see a way out of your financial situation on your own, contact your nearest credit counselling service.

Credit Canada Debt Solutions offers no-cost/low-cost confidential credit counselling. It serves anyone who needs advice about how to handle money and reduce or eliminate debt. Credit Canada Debt Solutions also arranges debt retirement programs to help individuals deal with their creditors and get out of debt. Credit Canada Debt Solutions has offices and affiliated agencies to serve you throughout Canada.

If you think that you may have a debt problem, take a moment to answer these questions:

1. Do your monthly bills often exceed your monthly income? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
2. Do you have to borrow money to make minimum monthly payments? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
3. Are you unable to make minimum monthly payments? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_
4. Would you like free advice on how to successfully manage your personal finances? Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

If you have answered yes to any of these questions, you will probably benefit from professional debt counselling from Credit Canada Debt Solutions.

For more information, contact us.  
Telephone 416 228 DEBT (3328)  
1 800 267 2272 from outside Toronto  
Email [info@creditcanada.com](mailto:info@creditcanada.com)  
or visit [www.CreditCanada.com](http://www.CreditCanada.com)

## Notes

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## Feel free to contact Credit Canada Debt Solutions.

As a non-profit charitable organization we provide affordable, practical assistance and confidential guidance to people in need. We are registered and Provincially licensed.

For a free online assessment go to:  
[www.CreditCanada.com](http://www.CreditCanada.com)

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