

Simplify Your Holidays to Avoid Excess Spending

Nobody strives for stressful holidays with too much to do. But it happens. When you feel overwhelmed and time is running out, it's easy to spend more money than you can afford. A good way to bypass that sense of being overwhelmed and the urge to overspend at the last minute is to create a holiday plan before the holiday season starts.

A useful time management strategy is to make a list of all the things you think you need to do. Making a list is a good first step, but it's the next steps that can help you the most. Once you have your long list of "to-dos," prioritize your list. Think about what is most important to you. Take some items off your list, and simplify. Most of us are better at adding to our lists than choosing what is most important!

For the third step, create a visual picture of when you can do these things. You'll need a calendar you can write on, erase, and write on again. Start by adding holiday events such as office parties, school concerts, family get-togethers – places you need to be and when.

Next, take one item from your to-do list and mark it on your calendar on the date when it must be completed. You can download a holiday calendar from U of I Extension at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/champaigncenter/cfe3163.html>. Divide the to-do item into specific, simple tasks that need and add these tasks to your calendar. For example, at Thanksgiving time you may want to clean house the weekend before and begin cooking early in the week.

As you add tasks to your calendar, notice if too many things are on the same day. If it looks overwhelming on the calendar, think how you will feel that day! Here are some options to consider:

- delete items from your to-do list,
- start doing holiday tasks earlier,
- delegate some of the work to family members, or
- change and simplify your plans.

Let's try an example of using the calendar to plan an activity. Imagine that your nephew lives in California. This year you want to plan well so that you do not have to spend extra money to send his Christmas package overnight! To be sure your nephew's present arrives on time, you decide to mail on December 15th. Therefore, the present needs to be wrapped and boxed on the 14th. You want to wrap the package on the weekend when you have free time. Thus, the present needs to be purchased by Saturday, December 11th.

Wow – Christmas is on the 25th and you are all ready backed up to the 11th! When can you go shopping? Will you do it the weekend before or earlier? Would it be cheaper or easier to shop online and send the present directly to your nephew? What other options do you have? Is your plan workable?

When you plan your activities on a calendar you can see when too much is planned. Then you can evaluate your plan and si

Campus resource: UI Extension

University of Illinois Extension provides quality information to people to help with a variety of topics including financial, family and nutrition wellness. For more information about programs and events in Champaign County visit the Champaign Extension Office website at <http://web.extension.illinois.edu/champaign/index.html>.

The U of I Extension Financial Wellness program helps people learn about financial topics through presentations, events and one-on-one visits. For more information, visit our Financial Wellness website at <http://fw.extension.uiuc.edu>