



# Senior Series

A partnership between Ohio State University Extension  
and Ohio Aging Network professionals



For more information, visit the Ohio Department of Aging web site at: <http://www.goldenbuckeye.com>  
and Ohio State University Extension's "Aging in Ohio" web site at: <http://seniorseries.osu.edu>

## How to Reduce Living Expenses

Older adults who live on a fixed income can experience challenges when their bills exceed their income. Here are some suggestions for lowering everyday expenses:

### Electricity/Gas

#### *In the winter*

- Lower thermostats to a comfortable temperature between 65 and 68 degrees. Wear sweaters. Consider installing a programmable thermostat to adjust the temperature at night or during the day if you are out.
- Caulk around windows and doors. Use storm doors and windows or put plastic on inside to keep out the cold.
- Open blinds during the day to allow the sun to warm rooms.

- Close off rooms that are not used and close vents to those rooms if the home has central heat.

#### *In the summer*

- Use fans instead of or to supplement air conditioning. If using air-conditioning, set thermostat between 78 and 80 degrees. Use a programmable thermostat to turn up thermostats when you leave.
- Close blinds or curtains, especially on the south or west side of house, during the day to keep out sunlight. Turn lights and television off when not in the room. Open the refrigerator and freezer as infrequently as possible.

#### *In general*

- Turn off computer and monitor when not in use.

- Plug home appliances, such as televisions and DVD players, into a power strip. Turn off the strip when not in use.
- Make sure appliances and heating and cooling systems are properly maintained.
- Use compact fluorescent bulbs for lighting.
- Clean or replace filters on furnaces once a month or as needed. Make sure vents are not blocked.

## Telephone

- Only have basic local service. Avoid extras such as call waiting and call forwarding or inside wire maintenance fees.
- Shop for the best rates for long-distance service. Make long-distance calls during off-peak hours (evenings, weekends, and holidays) whenever possible.
- Compare calling card rates to long-distance rates. Use phone cards with low long-distance rates when beneficial.
- Consider using a cell phone for most calls. Many cell phone packages include unlimited calling for both local and long distance. Make sure your calling plan matches the pattern of calls you typically make. Understand peak calling periods, area coverage, roaming, and termination charges.

However, maintain a land line for security in case of a power outage or other emergency.

## Water

- Take short showers and shallow baths. Showers use less water than baths. Don't allow water to run while brushing your teeth or washing your face.
- Adjust water levels to the proper size load in the dishwasher or washing machine. If there are no water level choices, wash only full loads.
- Promptly repair leaks in toilets, faucets, and water lines.
- Lower the water heater temperature to 120 degrees.
- Insulate the hot water heater or purchase a more efficient (ENERGY STAR) model.

## Car Insurance

- Keep premiums low by having a good driving record. Take a driving course to brush up on skills if that lowers car insurance rates with your company.
- Purchase the minimum collision and comprehensive coverage (or drop the coverage for an old car) and raise the deductible.
- Use seat belts and anti-theft devices. Keep doors locked at all times, and valuables out of sight.

- Compare premiums, companies, and policies to get the best buy. Consider “wrapping” the car insurance policy with the home insurance if that lowers the rate.

## **Food**

- Plan menus for the week. Check supermarket ads to see which stores have the best prices on food items planned. Prepare a list to avoid impulse buying but be flexible enough to take advantage of in-store sales. Purchase basic ingredients rather than pre-packaged components or ready-made items.
- Go to the store once a week or less. Shop when the store is not crowded. Allow enough time to read labels and compare prices and nutrition information.
- Check unit pricing (price per ounce or other unit).
- Determine price per serving of meats by considering waste from bone and fat. Incorporate meatless meals into weekly menu plans.
- Do not go to the store hungry. Eat at home more often.
- Replace expensive convenience foods by “doing it yourself.” Fix casseroles or baked goods that can be frozen for later meals.
- Plan the use of leftovers so there will be less waste.

- Buy fresh fruits and vegetables in season. Preserve foods by canning, freezing, pickling, or making jellies.
- Use coupons only for products that the family normally uses. Patronize stores that double or triple them.
- If storage is available so that the food will not go to waste, buy in bulk. Store food safely to prevent spoilage and insect infestation.
- Split large quantities with a friend.
- Buy generic or no-name brands that are often less expensive than store or name brands.

## **Clothing**

- Buy clothing at the end of the season.
- Shop discount stores, yard sales, thrift shops, and outlet centers. Check clearance racks. Buy clothes that do not require dry-cleaning.
- Coordinate clothing so a few garments can mix and match into several outfits.
- Repair and, when possible, remodel clothing for continued wear. For those with sewing skills and equipment, make your own clothes.

## **Transportation**

- Buy the lowest octane level gas your car can handle.
- Keep vehicles in good running condition. Check fluid levels,

running condition of the engine, and tire pressure.

- Combine errands.
- Use public transportation, if available, or share travel with a neighbor or friend.
- Have needed repairs done by a certified mechanic. Ask friends for a reference.

### **Household Supplies**

- Buy inexpensive cleaning products and toiletries at discount stores.
- Buy in bulk, if there is storage space.

### **Health**

- Maintain good health habits.
- Avoid smoking and drinking. Consider spending money saved on fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Shop for the best doctor fees and prescription prices. Investigate the Medicare drug program.
- Take advantage of health department clinics and free immunizations.
- Buy first aid and non-prescription items at discount stores.

### **Entertainment**

- Go to movie matinees, bargain nights, less expensive theaters, or watch videos or movies on television or borrow a video from the library.

- Play board and card games.
- Read.
- Take a hike, swim, or go on a picnic.
- Attend free concerts, museums, and community events.
- Take advantage of local parks and state park facilities for free or low-cost outings. Check the web site <http://www.heartofohio.com> for information about events and places to visit in Ohio.

### **Gifts**

- Give of yourself. Offer to baby-sit or run errands for others.
- Make homemade gifts or share a family treasure or heirloom.

### **Home Furnishings**

- Check consumer magazines for low-cost decorating ideas.
- Shop resale shops and thrift stores for gently used items.
- For major purchases, consider an offer of store credit with no interest charged for several months. Pay off the amount before the time is up to avoid interest costs.
- Make your own home accessories.

### **Pets**

- Keep animals healthy with regular veterinarian visits.
- Use coupons and watch for sale prices on pet food.

## Miscellaneous

- Use the public library as a source of information, instead of buying books, newspapers, and magazines. Share printed materials with friends.
- Select a bank or credit union account with a free checking account or no minimum balance.

## Sources

Bard, Ella Mae; Hudson, Nancy; Johnson, Diane; and McKinney, Carolyn. (revised 2003). *Manage Your Money Home Study Course*. Ohio State University Extension, Columbus, OH.

Lowe, R.E., Malouf, C.A., Jacobson, A.R. (1997). *Consumer Education and Economics*. New York: Glencoe-McGraw/Hill.

U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy web page: Tips on Saving Energy & Money at Home, <http://www1.eere.energy.gov/consumer/tips/>

## For More Information

Consumer Literacy Consortium (2006). *66 Ways to Save Money* (50 cents) or [www.66ways.org](http://www.66ways.org)

Consumer Reports Magazine. [www.ConsumerReports.org](http://www.ConsumerReports.org)

From Federal Consumer Information Center, P.O. Box 100, Pueblo, CO 81002; free on web at [www.pueblo.gsa.gov](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov)

USDA, “Recipes and Tips for Healthy, Thrifty Meals,” 119JJ (2000, \$6.50)

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