

Holiday Survival Guide



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Congratulations on taking this important step to a brighter financial future. Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada, Inc. has been helping Canadians across the country solve their credit and debt problems for years.

Our Educational Team has created over twenty-five publications to help you improve your personal finances. By logging onto www.consolidatedcredit.ca you can access all of our publications free of charge. We have tools to help you become debt-free, use your money wisely, plan for the future, and build wealth. The topics Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada addresses range from identity theft to building a better credit rating; from how to buy a home to paying for university. On our website you will also find interactive tools that allow you to calculate your debt and see how much it is costing you.

We are dedicated to personal financial literacy and providing a debt-free life for Canadians. If you are overburdened by high interest rate credit card debt, then I invite you to speak with one of our trained counsellors free of charge by calling 1-800-656-4079 for free professional advice.

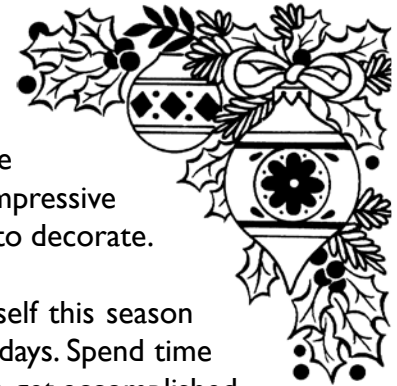
Sincerely,

Jeffrey Schwartz
Executive Director

Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada, Inc.

Holiday Survival Guide

No matter how much you love the holidays or how well you've planned, the holidays always seem to create stress. You may find yourself searching for the perfect gift, trying to create an impressive dinner for guests or scrambling to decorate.



The best gift you can give yourself this season is to take time to plan your holidays. Spend time thinking about what you need to get accomplished, and create a plan for how you want to spend your time, energy and money.

Here are some questions to ask yourself and those you share the holidays with:

- **What are your best holiday memories?**
- **What do you enjoy most about the holidays?**
- **What do you like the least?**
- **What is the one thing you would most like to do this holiday season?**
- **What is the one thing you do not want to do this holiday season?**
- **What can you do to make the holidays less stressful?**
- **How can you spend less yet still enjoy the holidays?**



By discussing and planning for the holidays with your family, stress can be reduced and your holiday can be enjoyable.

We would like to offer you some specific suggestions to get your creative juices flowing. Here are ten ways to make the holiday season less stressful and less expensive:

1. **Focus On Experiences, Not Gifts.** You probably can't remember the majority of the gifts you gave or received as a child. You may however, have fond memories of events or family traditions that you treasure. It is never too late to create a new tradition that your family can enjoy year after year. Explore your family's ethnic heritage to find new holiday traditions you can incorporate into your celebration. An Internet search can yield a lot of information on holiday traditions. Another good source is your local library where you may want to check out books on traditions such as ***The Book of New Family Traditions: How to Create Great Rituals for Holidays & Everyday*** by Meg Cox.

2. **Create a Family Gift-making Project.** Get the whole family involved in a gift-making project. Homemade paper ornaments; themed gift baskets; framed photos or scrapbooks; homemade breads or jams; potted plants or herbs (decorate the pot if you're so inclined); or soap are just a few of the ideas to choose from. Remember to start early so you have time for mistakes, and make extras to keep on hand for last minute gifts. Your local craft store can be a good source of information and inspiration.

3. **Play "Secret Santa."** Children will love this project: try to surprise neighbours or family members with good deeds without getting caught. For example, shovel a neighbour's walk without being seen. Suggest to your kids that they do a sibling's chores as a surprise.



4. **Give of Yourself.** Create gift certificates offering services to your friends, neighbours or your family. Coupon books can be decorated and personalized for the recipient. Tasks may include a car wash, baking, babysitting, laundry or something fun like a game night at home or a day at the park.

5. **Ask for Gift Receipts** when you buy gifts and include them with the item you are giving. This makes returns or exchanges easier on the recipient and you know that your gift will not go unused or unworn.

6. **Stick to A Budget.** Use the holiday spending planner worksheets in this brochure to plan your holiday spending. If you have children, help them set a budget for holiday gifts and prioritize their wish lists within that budget. Suggest that adult family members exchanging gifts set a spending limit and consider drawing names instead of buying for everyone. Also, consider giving gift cards for family gifts. Then hit the stores on Boxing Day for amazing bargains!

7. Use No More Than Two Credit Cards. Buying an item with a credit card gives you protection that paying by cash or cheque does not. If the item is not what you ordered, or there is a problem, you may be able to get your creditor's help in obtaining a refund. Keep in mind, though, that credit cards can make it easy to spend over your budget.

Try limiting yourself to a low-rate credit card for any purchases that you may need to pay off over time and another credit card you can pay in full when the bill arrives. Write down your holiday purchases when you make them so you don't lose track of your spending. If you do need to dispute a purchase made by credit card, make sure you put your request in writing to your credit card company right away to protect your rights. A follow-up phone call regarding the dispute may be a good idea as well. Many creditors will handle and resolve your dispute over the phone.

8. Plan Ahead. Make a list of people and gifts. Don't "over buy" or purchase items just because they are on sale. This can result in wasted money on gifts that are never even given.

9. Make A Day of the Holiday. Plan a special activity for the afternoon or the day after the holiday. Whether it's skiing or skating, putting together a family skit or building a bonfire in the evening, make an effort to focus on spending time with those you love. If you don't have family to share the day with, look for opportunities to volunteer and help others who may be alone on the holiday.

10. Be Thankful. When we're bombarded with holiday stress, it is easy to lose sight of the things that are really important. Take time for yourself during the holidays to reflect on why you are celebrating in the first place. Create a holiday memory book to record the things and the people that you are thankful for. Make more than one and give as gifts to family!

Read This Before Your First Shopping Trip

Trying to find the perfect gift in one shopping trip isn't always practical, especially if you are someone who follows the "shop till you drop" approach. Just short of dropping, you may decide you are tired of browsing around and buy the next thing you see, regardless of cost. Make a list of who you have to



buy for and what you want to buy them. Start shopping early enough to leave time to comparison shop for the best prices.

Before heading to the mall, take time to examine catalogues and sales advertisements so you'll know where you need to go to find the gifts you are looking for. If you do any holiday entertaining, buy non-perishables in bulk at discount warehouses. Most of the time you can end up saving as much as 20%.

It's a fact that people tend to spend more money when paying with plastic instead of cash. The reason is because there is no emotional attachment to plastic like there is to cold hard cash. If you don't want to run up your credit card bills, don't take them with you. Instead, decide on the amount you want to spend and use your Interac card. Since it directly debits your chequing account, you will be more conscientious of what you are spending. Make a holiday budget and stick to it.

Save receipts. Items often go on sale after the holiday rush. You can sometimes be refunded the difference between the price you bought a gift at and the sale price. Phone for store policies before you make the trip. Also, keep in mind that most stores will not take returns or exchanges on Boxing Day.

Know the sales tactics. Retailers want you to buy, buy, buy. You have been through it a hundred times, “would you like some fries with that,” the sales person asks. If you let your self get enticed by this maneuver, shopping can get really expensive. You go in to buy a shirt or blouse, and then they want to sell you all the accessories that “match perfectly” or are buy one get one 50% off.

Follow these tips to make this your best shopping season yet. For next year, try to purchase one present a month starting in January and see how relaxing the holidays can be.

- Think about what you are charging—it might be better to pay cash for those smaller purchases. Stocking stuffers can add up quickly, impacting your next statement’s “New Balance” column.
- Credit card issuers give you a line of credit based on information available to them about your financial situation, but you are the best judge of what you can comfortably manage. Just because you have a certain amount of credit available, doesn’t mean you should use all of it during the holiday season. **REMEMBER:** Never borrow more than you can reasonably pay off. Giving gifts should be a gesture, not a sacrifice.

For a Free Consultation with a Certified Credit Counselor call 1-800-656-4079 or visit www.ConsolidatedCredit.ca

Holiday Spending Planner

Item	Planned \$ to spend	Actual \$ spent
Decorations		
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
Entertainment		
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
Cards, Postage and Shipping		
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
Travel		
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
Other		
	\$	\$
	\$	\$
	\$	\$

Holiday Spending Planner

Gift Recipient	Item Wanted	Planned \$ to spend	Actual \$ spent
Immediate Family		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Total		\$	\$
Extended Family			
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Total		\$	\$
Friends			
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Total		\$	\$
Co-Workers			
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Total		\$	\$

Holiday Spending Planner

Gift Recipient	Item Wanted	Planned \$ to spend	Actual \$ spent
Neighbors and others		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Grand Total		\$	\$
Charitable Giving			
		\$	\$
		\$	\$
Total		\$	\$

- Remember to plan for gifts you may want to give to your children's teachers or coaches, as well as those for church or synagogue members.

Holiday Tip Guide

Person to Tip	Typical Amounts	Amount Actually Spent
Garbage Collector	\$10 – \$20 per person	\$
Newspaper Delivery	\$20 – \$25 for daily delivery \$5 – \$15 for weekend only	\$
Regular babysitter	One or two night's pay	\$
Nanny or housekeeper	One week's pay	\$
Apartment manager	\$20 – \$100	\$
Hair stylist	Cost of one session	\$
Postal Carrier	\$10 – \$20	\$

Shopping Strategies

If you do all of your holiday shopping on a credit card, you actually can spend two to three times as much, once you figure in interest and finance charges. Here are some ways to avoid holiday debt.

PAY WITH CASH. Spend money you already have: Use Interac, cash, or write cheques.

Make a budget—not a per-person budget, but an overall budget for all of your holiday spending. After the budget is complete, compare it with the amount you have available to spend. If it's more than you can afford, look for areas to trim expenses.

Keep track of how much you have spent on gifts, dining and entertainment. Make a list of travel expenses, holiday clothes, cards, postage, wrapping paper and decorations. Remember, little things like wrapping paper, shipping and tax add up, so put these things into your budget. Also look for ways to trim the cost of decorations and wrapping paper. Buy plain paper and have the kids decorate their gifts themselves with stamps or crayons. Use cards from the previous season to make gift tags for this season. If stores offer free gift wrapping, take advantage of it!

Make a list of all of the people who you would like to give gifts to, and rank people on the list.

Know what you want to buy, and for whom, before you go shopping. Check to see what stores have the best bargains and make a list with the costs. After you finish your list, total the costs and prepare to spend only that amount in each store.

Shop alone when you're doing the bulk of your gift buying. It will help you avoid impulse spending. Don't shop while you're tired or hungry.

Steer clear of high-price fad items and instead buy practical gifts that last longer such as clothes, tires, or appliances. Resist the little extra gifts. They often add up considerably and can break your budget.

Think before using your credit card to take advantage of holiday "bargains." Comparison-shop, particularly for large ticket items. It's good to take advantage of these opportunities, but always ask yourself, "Would I buy this if it weren't on sale?"

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HOLIDAY CRIME PRACTICE HOLIDAY SHOPPING SAFETY ONLINE

Do:

Always use a credit card to purchase items. If you are scammed, you typically only owe \$50 or less for the loss instead of the whole amount. If you are new to shopping online, stick with companies you have heard of. When you enter the shopping cart or the e-commerce area of a site, check the beginning of the web site's address, or URL secure servers show "https" instead of "http".

If you participate in an online auction, check the references of the seller — they are usually kept on the auction web site. Factor shipping costs into your purchase price while shopping. It is often quite expensive to ship from the US to Canada if you are shopping on a US company's site.

Don't:

Never put credit card information or personal information like social insurance numbers in an e-mail. Legitimate shopping web sites use special forms. Never respond to offers that come in unsolicited e-mails — these are often scams.

Consolidated offers these suggestions for money management success in the New Year:

Track your spending. Write down all of your expenses and eliminate those that are not smart or necessary.

Create a budget. Construct a cash flow sheet showing income and outgoing expenses. Determine how much money is left each month and decide how you are going to save. Stay within your budget.

Begin a savings plan. Start saving a Loonie-a-day and all pocket change. It will average \$40 a month.

Pay by cash instead of using credit cards. Do not take on any new debt and pay off old debt.

Have weekly family meetings on improving spending with other family members.

Start fresh! Clean your house and sell items that are losing value or donate them to charity.



Consolidated Credit Counseling Services of Canada is a registered charitable nonprofit educational organization that can help you with your financial resolutions.

Call 1-800-656-4079 new number for free advice and counselling.

Counsellors can answer questions like:

Should I tell my bank if I am having trouble making payments?

What can I do about the bill collectors who are harassing me?

What is the difference between a debt management plan and a consolidation loan?

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