



MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR MONEY

FINANCIAL TIPS FOR TODAY'S CONSUMER

CONSUMER CREDIT COUNSELING SERVICE OF MONTANA & WYOMING

Dollars and Sense Classes: Invest in YOUR Future

Dollars and Sense classes are the next step in financial freedom. These classes offer a toolkit for financial success. The four part series includes:

1. Understanding Credit and Credit Reports
2. Making Budgeting Work with Your Schedule
3. Predatory Lending and Identity Theft
4. Insurance, Financial Institutions, and Taxes

Classes are sponsored by the Montana Housing Network and are free to participants. The class schedule is:

Tuesdays at CCCS from 6:30 - 8 p.m.

Second and Third Saturday of each month from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Participants must complete all four parts to graduate the series. Some local partners are offering incentives for participants to graduate, that include participation in Individual Development Account (IDA) programs for education/training or homeownership. To register or for more information, please call Lauri at 454.5727.

Small Steps to Health and Wealth

CCCS is partnering with the MSU Extension Service of Cascade County to offer a three part series on Health and Wealth. This series of three classes offers strategies to make small, positive behavior changes to improve your health and personal finances. You will learn about 25 ways to improve your life and take charge of your future. The three classes are scheduled on Thursdays, May 15, 22, and 29 from 6-8 p.m. at the Cascade County Extension office. The cost for the series is \$12.00 per person. Materials include the Small Steps to Health and Wealth™ workbook and supplies.

Please pre-register at the Extension office, 1807 Third Street NW in Westgate Mall. For more information, please call 454-6980 and ask for Jona McNamee or Wendy Wedum.

10 little expenses that add up fast

Do you wonder where your money goes, especially if you're not a big spender? It's surprisingly easy to blow thousands, a few dollars at a time. It's easy to fritter away money on little daily expenses. If you fall into these money traps, learn to avoid them and pocket the savings.

Coffee: According to the National Coffee Association, the average price for a cup of brewed coffee is \$1.38. There are roughly 260 weekdays per year, so buying one coffee every weekday morning costs almost \$360 per year.

Cigarettes: The Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids reports that the average price for a pack of cigarettes in the United States is \$4.54. Pack-a-day smokers fork out \$1,650 a year. Weekend smoker? Buying a pack once a week adds up, too: \$236.

Alcohol: Drink prices vary based on the location. But assuming an average of \$5 per beer including tip, buying two beers per day adds up to \$3,650 per year. Figure twice that for two mixed drinks a day at the local bar. That's not chump change.

Bottled water from convenience stores: A 20-ounce bottle of Aquafina bottled water costs about \$1. One bottle of water per day costs \$365 per year. It costs the environment plenty, too.

Manicures: The Day Spa Magazine Price Survey of 2004 found that the average cost of a manicure is \$20.53. A weekly manicure sets you back about \$1,068 per year.

Car washes: The average cost for a basic auto detailing package is \$58, according to Costhelper.com. The tab for getting your car detailed every two months: \$348 per year.

Weekday lunches out: \$9 will generally cover a decent lunch most workdays. If you buy, rather than pack, a lunch five days a week for one year, you shell out about \$2,340 a year.

Vending-machine snacks: The average vending machine snack costs \$1. Buy a pack of cookies every afternoon at work and pay \$260 per year.

Here's how to find the leaks in your wallet. Interest charges on credit card bills: According to a survey released at the end of May, the median amount of credit card debt carried by Americans is \$6,600. The average interest rate on a standard card is about 13%. Making the minimum payment each month, it will take 250 months (almost 21 years) to pay off the debt and cost \$4,868 in interest. Ouch!

For more tips on how to plug the holes in your budget visit:
www.cccsmt.org/tips

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Questions or comments?
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LEAP INTO FINANCIAL STABILITY

- Organize your financial papers. It's likely you are currently digging through them to prepare your taxes, so now is an ideal time to improve your filing system. Don't over-complicate things. As a matter of fact, the simpler the better. Start by putting all of your financial documents in one place, and then break them down by category. As bills arrive, file them where they belong.
- Throw away old paperwork. You can shred ATM receipts and bank deposits after appearing on bank statements. Pay stubs also can be shredded after matching them with your year-end statement. You don't need to keep your utility statements if you've already paid them. After checking to make sure your credit card statement is accurate and you have paid the bill, you can shred your credit card statements.
- Go paperless. Once you're organized, you don't want to be flooded with new paperwork coming in. One way to cut down on the paperwork is to opt for your bills to be sent to your password protected email. Decreasing the number of bills sent to your home also can help fight identity theft since bills won't be left unattended in your mailbox.
- Do the math. Add up your total debt, writing down who you owe and what interest rate you're paying. Seeing this in black and white may be staggering, but is essential to being on top of your finances.
- Create a cash flow chart. Commit to visiting your personal financial center once each week. Since you're filing your bills as they arrive, you'll easily be able to review what needs paying, the amount due and due date. Construct a calendar reflecting all paydays and which bills will come out of that money.
- Consider online bill paying. Getting organized will help avoid paying bills late, but for people who travel, are procrastinators, or simply forgetful, online bill paying is a must. This is ideal for payments that are the same every month, such as a mortgage payment or car payment. With late fees in the \$40 range, paying late is throwing good money out the window.
- Make sure that you have all the necessary legal documents in order. It's smart to store these documents along with insurance policies offsite, for instance in a safe deposit box. However, make sure that others know where to access them in case of an emergency.
- Get to know your credit report. Savvy consumers know what's on their credit report. After all, information contained in the credit report strongly influences the credit score, those three little numbers that dictate your future borrowing power. Review your credit report for accuracy, making sure that all information is correct and about you. Consumers are allowed one free credit report every 12 months from each of the three credit reporting agencies. To access your free report, go to www.annualcreditreport.com or call (877) 322-8228.
- Seek financial help. If coming face-to-face with your finances has left you in a quandary, consider seeking professional help. A trained and certified counselor can organize your finances, making suggestions where appropriate, build a realistic spending plan, and address any financial concerns you may have.

Call your CCCS Financial Counselor, they'll be able to help.

Family Craft Corner

A Jewellery Box for Mother's Day

What you'll need:

- 1 package of craft sticks, size of your choice
- White craft glue
- Pony bead or buttons
- White acrylic paint (optional)
- Pink glitter glue (optional)
- Craft jewels (optional)
- Paint brush
- Wax paper

How to make it:

- Lay several craft sticks on the wax paper, next to each other and touching. Be sure to line them up evenly.
- Use two more craft sticks and glue on top of the others, one at each end, to hold the rest together. (See photo) They will look similar to a fence or log raft.
- Use two more craft sticks and glue ends of stick to the ends of the sticks that are already in place so that they create a square. Keep repeating this alternating process to build up the sides as high as you would like.
- Make the lid by repeating steps 1 & 2 above.
- Let everything dry completely.
- You can leave your box plain or choose to paint it. You can also add a shiny effect by painting on a layer of glitter glue over white paint.
- Glue a pony bead to the center of the finished lid as a handle.
- You can further embellish your jewelry box by decorating it with craft jewels.
- If you don't have a pony bead, find a couple of matching buttons and stack them with glue.

Tips:

If you would like to make a ring holder, use miniature craft sticks. For a larger box use jumbo craft sticks. Use a black permanent marker to write your child's name and the year on the bottom of the box. This makes a great keepsake for your memory box!