



Staying Ahead of Inflation

How to make ends meet despite rising prices

Although I've covered this subject in previous articles, I intend to repeat the main points briefly in the hopes that it will make for easier reading. The following is, in effect, a checklist.

Reducing power costs:

- ✓ Switch off electrical units at the wall socket when not required. Even when only on standby, they draw power. This includes computers, DVD players, game consoles; plus ovens and microwaves. If they are just left on for the clock, how about wearing a watch?
- ✓ Switch off lights that are not needed because nobody's in the room; the same with heaters.
- ✓ Air conditioners and reverse-cycle units not in use for any length of time should be switched off at the breaker box. Some of these burn between 15 and 35 watts an hour just on standby.
- ✓ Whether gas or electric, be ready to put the food in the oven as soon as the correct temperature is reached. When baking is finished, the cabinet still retains heat for some time if the door is kept closed, so switch off as soon as convenient. At this time the plates can be warmed at no extra cost.
- ✓ On the stove top, only have the burners as high as needed; and turn off when not in use, if only for a minute or two. Every little helps.
- ✓ Avoid opening and closing fridges and freezers too often – they take time and power to return to the set temperature – and don't leave doors open or slam them shut!
- ✓ Reduce water-heating costs by having shorter showers, preferably during the day when the electric light doesn't need to be on.
- ✓ Program the washing machine for a cold-water wash. If a hot one is required, make sure the hose from the regular hot-water service is attached and turned on; otherwise the heater in the unit will have to do the job and it is costly.
- ✓ Unless absolutely necessary, don't use a tumble drier which is very expensive to run; and it will steam up the laundry.

Food and eating:

- ✓ Take-outs are expensive and not always nutritious. Make your own meals wherever possible.
- ✓ Only cook enough for the number of diners. If there are leftovers, either freeze for later, or use next day – see Recipes: 12 Encore Pie and 20 Fried Spud Patties.
- ✓ Don't buy lunches – make them at home; and freeze sliced loaves of bread: they keep longer and the slices are fresh when defrosted.
- ✓ Take food from the freezer in advance and defrost naturally – it's cheaper than the microwave.

Shopping:

- ✓ If you don't need it, don't buy it!
- ✓ When certain products are priced higher than you would normally pay, think twice before buying.
- ✓ Plan your shopping - make a list to suit the budget and stick to it.
- ✓ Avoid impulse buying; and beware of grabbing too much of any specials in the

fresh-food section: if it goes off before it is used, that's wasted money.

- ✓ Look through the junk mail for specials, but before tossing them in the trolley, check use-by dates first. Just don't go overboard with snacks and treats.

Motoring:

- ✓ Keep your vehicle in good order. For tips, download the CL04 Autocheck PDF.
- ✓ Plan up front to make the best of your road trips, so avoiding frequent back-tracking that wastes time and fuel (see MM19 Drive Your Dollar Further).
- ✓ Don't wait until the tank is almost dry. Once it is close to quarter, scout for the cheapest fuel.

Phone calls:

- ✓ Select a plan that suits both budget and what you need, but beware of signing up for long-term unless you are positive circumstances won't change in the near future.
- ✓ If you are paying for the kids' usage, monitor it closely. Impose a limit for calls and texts – anything over comes out of their allowances.
- ✓ With pre-paid and pay-as-you-go, always be on the lookout for cheaper options before you re-charge.
- ✓ If you have a decent Internet allocation, use emails and Facebook for short messages.
- ✓ For voice and video chats, hook up to Skype. Even calls to landlines are cheaper than the normal phone company's charges; and Skype to Skype costs nothing.

Credit cards:

- ✓ Never be tempted to max them out. If you are a pathological spendthrift, leave them at home.
- ✓ If you can't help yourself, either reduce the credit limit on the card, or cut it up!
- ✓ Try to pay more than the minimum to reduce the balance; and always on time. These cards cost a fortune in interest.
- ✓ Never card more in a month than you can afford to pay by the due date, and some.
- ✓ Not all cards have the same fees, interest rates, or statement periods. Shop around. If you don't need reward schemes, why pay for them?

I think that's enough for now. If you've seen it all before and are still out of pocket thanks to inflation, maybe have a second, closer look. If it's all new to you, but seemingly boring and not worth the trouble, that's your choice. Aside from economising, the only other ways to beat rising costs are to ask for a pay-raise or win Lotto. Alternatively, you could always emigrate to the Moon; but I heard tell that the price of green cheese there is out of this world!

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