NEW YORK STATE | Department of State
Consumer Protection

Money Savings Guide

50 Ways to Stretch Your Dollars on Everyday Expenses

DOS.NY.GOV/Consumer-Protection

Kathy Hochul, Governor

Robert J. Rodriguez, Secretary of State

Dear Fellow New Yorkers,

The New York Department of State is your gateway to opportunity in New York, and we are proud to serve you. We offer a wide variety of services to New Yorkers, from licensing professional fields like real estate and beauty enhancement to ensuring the health and safety of Mixed Martial Arts and professional boxing events through our Athletic Commission to providing services and resources for New Americans.

The Department of State is also home to the Division of Consumer Protection, which focuses on protecting and informing New York's consumers through resources and education materials, like this Money Savings Guide. Consumers are changing the way they shop to manage expenses and using different strategies to save money. Everyone's financial situation is unique, and small changes can make a big difference. That's why the Department of State's Division of Consumer Protection is offering this resource to provide practical money-saving tips to help New Yorkers like you stretch their dollars further on everyday expenses.

We hope you'll use these helpful tips to save more of your hard-earned money.

Robert J. Rodriguez, New York State Secretary of State

The Division of Consumer Protection serves to assist, educate, and empower New York consumers. The Money Savings Guide offers fifty different strategies to help New York consumers save on essential expenses, which includes groceries, utilities/energy, transportation, subscriptions, general shopping, and entertainment. The Division seeks to empower New Yorkers by providing this Guide to support everyday household spending.

Paula O'Brien, Director, Division of Consumer Protection

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MANAGING EVERYDAY EXPENSES

Use the "A.C.E.S" steps to set the foundation to manage your finances and everyday expenses.

Adjust financial goals and regularly review your progress. Gradually adjust your budget each month depending on your needs, and don't forget to plan for emergencies.

Create a monthly budget plan to find areas to cut back. Review your budget regularly to be sure it still reflects your latest spending habits and income level. If you are prone to impulse buying, plan for it. Create a line item in your budget specifically for those impulsive purchases.

Evaluate your current spending habits and track expenses. Get into the habit of regularly monitoring and tracking your finances and pay close attention to where your money goes. Use an expense tracker or a small planner and review your expenses regularly.

Separate essential and discretionary spending. Understand how well you are prepared for all your planned and unexpected expenses. Determine how much you must set aside for monthly necessities (food, shelter, transportation, etc.).

NEW YORK STATE | Department of State Consumer Protection

Tips to help you efficiently spend on essential categories:

GROCERIES

Plan your meals. Planning meals in advance, including breakfast, lunch and dinner, will reduce food waste and cut down on expensive meal delivery or dining-out costs. Make a grocery list to support the plan and reduce impulsive purchases.

Look for deals. Plan meals around a few bulk ingredients or based on the weekly grocery sales circular to ensure you're buying items on sale. Take advantage of store savings and enroll in store reward programs. Search for online coupons, use store savings and rewards cards, and watch for manufacturer coupons attached to the items in-store.

Shop strategically for food. Take inventory of what you have at home before going shopping. Go to the grocery store with a list, having planned out your meals until your next grocery trip.

Reduce food waste:

▪ **Learn about food product dating.** According to the FDA, confusion over date labeling accounts for an estimated 20 percent of consumer food waste. Important tips to know:

• Except for infant formula, manufacturers are not required by Federal law or regulation to place quality-based date labels on packaged food.

• Manufacturers apply date labels at their own discretion and for a variety of reasons. The most common is to inform consumers and retailers of the date to which they can expect the food to retain its desired quality and flavor.

• *Best if Used By* is the standard phrase to indicate the date until which a product will be at its best flavor and quality, not the date an item will spoil. Consumers should examine foods that are past their *Best if Used By* date for signs of spoilage before they throw them away.

For example, bread past its Best if Used By date may be stale, but if it is not moldy or spoiled, it could be used to make French toast, croutons, breadcrumbs and several other items you may otherwise buy at the store.

• To learn more tips on how to cut food waste, visit FDA.GOV.

▪ **Use your freezer.** Freezing is a great way to store most foods to keep them from going bad until you are ready to eat them.

▪ **Understand food and beverage storage.** It will help you maximize the freshness and quality of items. Download the **USDA FoodKeeper app** on your mobile device for information on storing different foods to maintain freshness and quality safely.

▪ **Got Leftovers?** Make one dinner a week your 'smorgasbord night'. Reheat those leftovers as is or turn them into an entirely different meal by adding some additional ingredients.

Consider planting a garden in the Spring. This can help save both time and money. Turn those harvested fresh veggies into lunches and dinners, and then can or freeze your excess harvest to enjoy it all year long.

Wholesale clubs. Purchase in bulk to save money on items you frequently buy. Wholesale shopping also allows you to stock up for fewer shopping trips. Some wholesale clubs allow membership sharing, and that could mean splitting the membership fee with a friend or family member. Remember to cancel memberships you aren't using.

Buy seasonal fruits and vegetables. Many fruits and vegetables peak at a certain time of year. Prices normally drop when they're in season and rise when they're not. Learn what's in season by visiting **FoodSafety.gov/Keep-Food-Safe**.

UTILITIES / ENERGY SAVINGS

HEATING/COOLING:

- **Check your thermostat:** Each degree you lower your thermostat can cut your fuel consumption by approximately 3%. Installing a programmable thermostat can automatically adjust the temperature based on your home, work, and sleep schedule and provide an estimated cost savings of 10-20% on your monthly heating and cooling bills.

- **Weatherize and insulate your home:** Help your home to retain heat during cold weather by insulating your attic and outside walls, sealing and insulating heating ducts, removing window air conditioners, wrapping or covering wall air conditioners, and sealing any cracks around walls and windows.

- **Get your heating system tested and tuned:** Conduct annual checkups to help ensure the efficiency of your system. Replace your furnace filters at least every three months to keep your equipment running efficiently and consider replacing the filters once a month during heavy use months such as the summer and winter. A dirty filter slows down airflow and makes your system work harder to keep you comfortable.

- **Use ceiling or floor fans:** Avoid heating or cooling an entire house when only using one or two rooms by shutting off heat in any unused areas and closing vents in unused bedrooms. Use ceiling or portable floor fans in the rooms you are using to assist with heating and cooling.

- **Use radiators efficiently:** Move rugs and furniture away from heating vents and radiators. Blocked vents can disrupt air circulation and cause an imbalance in a home's heating system. Placing heat resistant reflector panels between radiators and walls can help heat the room instead of the wall.

- **Contact your heating provider:** Ask your home heating provider if they have any available bill assistance programs, pricing plans, or other opportunities to better manage your bill. If considering switching to a different pricing plan, take care to consider the full terms, benefits, and risks of each pricing plan. Your heating provider may also be able to provide information on external heating bill assistance programs and resources.

HOUSEHOLD:

▪ **Improve your water heater's efficiency:** Water heating accounts for about 14% of consumer energy bills. Wrapping your water heater in insulation, lowering water temperatures, insulating hot water pipes, and limiting hot water use can all decrease your energy bill.

▪ **Buy energy efficient appliances:** Appliances with the energystar label are designed to use at least 20% less energy than their standard counterparts and can save you money on your energy bills. Find options at **Energystar.gov**.

▪ **Use appliances wisely:** Conserve energy with larger appliances, such as by setting your refrigerator no lower than 38-40 degrees and using your dishwasher's rinse feature, which uses less water than rinsing by hand. Loading your dishwasher and washing machine to full capacity will minimize energy use and save water and detergent.

▪ **Dry clothes efficiently:** Avoid the cost of running your dryer by drying your clothes on a clothesline when weather permits or by using an indoor drying rack. If using a clothes dryer, avoid overfilling it which can cause longer drying cycles. Clean the lint trap in your dryer before every load – it is one of the easiest things you can do to ensure proper air circulation and increase the efficiency of your dryer.

▪ **Switch to modern light bulbs:** Replace conventional light bulbs (such as incandescent or halogen) with energy-efficient light bulb options (such as led bulbs, led fixtures, and smart light bulbs). Energy-efficient lighting uses less energy and lasts longer.

ELECTRONICS:

▪ **Shut down your computer:** When you shut down your computer, don't forget to turn off the monitor—it can use twice as much energy as the computer. Use an Underwriters Laboratories (UL) approved power strip for convenience so that all computer accessories can be turned off with one switch. Even in sleep mode, your computer may cost you $105 a year!

▪ **Use rechargeable batteries and charging units:** Rechargeable batteries are more cost-effective in the long term. Plug your battery charging system or power adapter into a UL approved power strip to enable you to shut off power with the flick of a switch. For even more savings, use a power strip with a timer or a programmable power strip.

▪ **Disconnect digital media players:** Turn off dvd and blu-ray players, audio players, and video game consoles when not in use to avoid wasting energy. Even when powered off, most electronics continue to draw power, often referred to as ghost electricity, vampire power or phantom power. To save energy and time, plug entertainment products into an UL approved power strip to centrally turn off all components at once.

▪ **Stream your content smartly:** Streaming through a game console uses up to 10 times as much energy as streaming on a laptop or tablet. Consider using another kind of device to stream—like a blu-ray player, set-top box, or smart tv that has earned an Energy Star® label.

VISIT NYSERDA.NY.GOV, FOR ADDITIONAL ENERGY SAVING TIPS

New York State Offers a Variety of Cost Assistance and Residential Programs to Help Reduce Home Energy Costs for All Income Groups:

- **Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP):** Overseen by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, is federally funded and can help eligible New Yorkers heat and cool their homes.

- **Home Energy Efficiency Programs:** NYSERDA offers a range of residential programs designed to help New York State residents identify areas where their homes are driving up energy costs and can provide assistance in completing energy efficiency improvements for a healthier, more comfortable home.

- **Home Energy Audits:** New Yorkers can conduct an energy audit of their home or apartment to learn about recommended efficiency improvements to save money on your energy bill. An audit can provide information on low-cost improvements as well as large-scale investments and available financial resources. Contact NYSERDA for assistance.

- **Weatherization Assistance Program:** The NYS Weatherization Assistance Program, which is administered by NYS Homes and Community Renewal, is the largest residential energy conservation program in the country. The program assists income-eligible homeowners and renters in New York by reducing heating and cooling costs through energy-conservation measures, while also addressing health and safety issues in their homes.

TRANSPORTATION

Plan your drives ahead of time. Combine errands into one trip to save time and money. Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as a longer multipurpose trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm. Trip planning ensures that traveling is done when the engine is warmed up and efficient, and it can reduce the distance you travel saving fuel and wear/tear on your vehicle.

Adjust your driving habits. Always accelerate gently and maintain a steady speed. Avoid aggressive driving (speeding, rapid acceleration and sudden braking), which wastes fuel. It can lower your fuel mileage by 33 percent at highway speeds and by 5 percent around town. Your brakes will appreciate it, too.

Keep your vehicle tuned up. Check the air filter, tire pressure and coolant. Check your vehicle's manual for the manufacturer's recommended timeline for oil changes. A poorly maintained car uses more gas and may lead to costly repairs.

Shop around for car insurance. Take time to analyze your insurance premiums and comparison shop for less expensive plans. Consumers can lower insurance premiums by 5% to 20% by bundling services, increasing deductibles and paying up front.

Use public transportation or carpool. It benefits everyone – the community, the environment and your wallet.

Save with pre-tax commuter benefits. Enroll in commuter benefits to pay commuting costs with pre-tax dollars. If your employer offers this benefit, you can set aside a certain portion of pre-tax wages (up to $300 per month), which can be used for mass transit and qualified paid parking while reducing your federal taxable income each year. That means you save by not paying federal income tax on that portion of your salary.

Reserve parking. There are several parking apps in the market that let you reserve parking spaces in advance in large metro areas. This helps you save time, money and gas – no need to circle the block looking for parking. You may be able to score significant savings off the drive-up rate if you reserve a parking space in advance.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Evaluate your current subscriptions and memberships. If you have multiple subscriptions, take the time to review what you really use and cancel those used infrequently.

Contact subscription services directly to find ways to save. Take advantage of discounts through company benefits, enroll in family share plans, pay fees annually vs. monthly, and ask the company if there are any other ways to save.

Cancel automatic renewals. Turn off auto-renewal which limits your opportunity to evaluate your subscriptions every year.

SHOPPING

Compare prices before you buy.
With a click of a button, you can quickly shop multiple sites, browse hundreds of items, comparison shop, and make purchase decisions for a variety of items. Just remember that before you click, take the time to carefully read and review what you're buying and who you're buying it from.

Plan ahead and match sales with coupons. To maximize your savings, check out store coupons, manufacturer coupons and search for deals on products you need, and then send those coupons to your phone to digitally scan them at checkout.

Take advantage of price matching. Many retailers will match the prices of local or large online competitors prior to purchase, and some will provide a pricing adjustment if their price drops shortly after purchase. Be aware of retailers' policies.

Know the refund and return policy before you buy. Not all stores permit returns. If you think that you may need to return an item, learn what to look for by visiting dos.ny.gov/consumer-protection and read our consumer alert on this topic, or you may get stuck with an item you can't use.

Understand the differences between warranties vs. service contracts before making big purchases. To avoid surprises and save, understand what to look for when reviewing warranties and service contracts.

Consider making a swap. Explore swap events in your community where everyone brings items they no longer want and wish to swap, and in exchange, everyone leaves with items they can use! New York City offers frequent stop 'n' swaps® events, and many local communities host similar events.

ENTERTAINMENT

New York State has many opportunities for free entertainment. Explore things to do throughout New York State by visiting **iLoveNY.com** or download the official I Love NY mobile app for great activity ideas.

Check with your community for free events. Many counties, cities, towns and villages offer community movie nights, music in the park, recreation programs or other seasonal free community events.

Check out the New York State Fair – the first fair in the nation. Every year, New Yorkers come together to experience an affordable, 13-day celebration of delicious food, eye-opening exhibits, family entertainment, concerts and great fun. The event also showcases thousands of animals and dozens of big-name entertainers. Children and seniors are admitted free every day of this celebration. There are also free days for students and youth.

Find a local county fair or food festival near you. All over New York State, you'll find numerous local events that offer a variety of fun filled activities - packed with amazing food, rides, parades, live entertainment, crafts and more! Enjoy a day filled with amazing attractions that won't break the bank.

Connect to nature. Visit any of the 250 New York State Park_s, historic sites, recreational trails and boat launches that offer a variety of entertainment opportunities for all ages and interests. There are plenty of outdoor activities all year round (hiking, camping, boating, etc.), nature centers, programs for the kids and more!

Visit museums. New York State has some of the world's most iconic museums. Some museums offer free admission every day or on specific days. Some also offer events, festivals and concert series that are free in the summer or throughout the year.

Check out the library. Libraries offer a wealth of items that New Yorkers can borrow, ranging from movies, music and videogames to free or discounted entrance passes to local museums and attractions. Additionally, there are often free events held at libraries, including workshops, computer classes and more. New Yorkers can also get free access to LinkedIn Learning (formerly Lynda.com) with a NY Public Library account, which offers thousands of online educational courses and tutorials taught by industry experts in software, creative and business skills.

Enjoy your next vacation camping. New York's 118 state campgrounds offer the perfect spot for a family getaway or reconnecting with friends. Located among some of the most breathtaking settings in North America, NYS campgrounds are an affordable vacation option for campers seeking variety, value and a place to create special memories that last a lifetime.

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The New York State Division of Consumer Protection provides resources and educational materials to consumers on product safety and voluntary mediation services between consumers and businesses.

The Consumer Assistance Helpline 1-800-697-1220 is available Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, excluding State Holidays.

Do you want to file a complaint? Consumer complaints can be filed on the Division of Consumer Protection website. Scan the QR code below to visit our website to access the ***"File a Complaint with Consumer Protection"*** section.

Scan the QR code to visit
The New York State
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