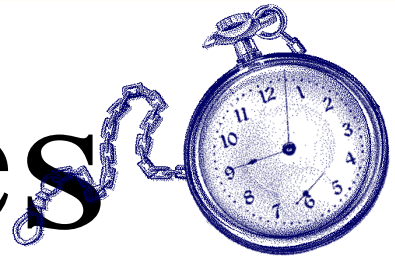


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PERSONAL FINANCE

Your credit card: 8 things to know

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Credit cards and credit cards with high limits used to be easy to get, but this is not the case anymore.

Credit card issuers are making changes to reduce their risk and increase profits in an uncertain economic time. Banks and credit card companies are trying to offset financial losses by increasing fees and interest rates on credit cards. A new credit card law seeks to help protect consumers: the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility and Disclosure (or Credit CARD) Act of 2009.

Most of the provisions go into effect Feb. 22, 2010, but a few start in August 2009. The new law will improve consumer disclosures and end some practices costly to consumers, but *it does not cap interest rates and fees*. Make sure you know the *new* rules of the game to help level the playing field.

1. Cancelling credit cards. Credit card issuers are “reassessing their risk” and cancelling customer credit cards without notice. They must notify you within 30 days of cancellation if the decision was based on your credit report, but they don’t have to notify you *before* cancelling your card. They don’t have to give you notice if cancellation is due to inactivity, late payments or default.

2. Reducing credit limits. Many credit card issuers check your credit report monthly. If they become concerned about your card usage, ability to pay, or amount of debt you are incurring on their card or other cards or loans, they can reduce your credit limit. If you carry a balance, a reduction in your credit limit can negatively affect your credit score (see fico.com).

3. Different interest rates. If your credit card allows you to get cash advances, you may pay one interest rate for credit purchases and a higher rate for cash advances. In the past, credit card issuers usually credited your payments first to the portion of your balance with the *lowest* interest rate. Under the new law, if you make more than the required minimum payment, the extra amount will be credited first toward the portion of your balance with the *highest* interest rate.

4. Interest rate increases. Previously, if consumers were late with one or two payments, or if they made late payments on unrelated accounts (known as *universal default*), credit

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NUTRITION & HEALTH

10 ideas for entertaining without breaking your budget



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As the holiday season approaches, opportunities to plan entertaining gatherings increase. In these tough economic times, we face the daunting task of keeping our family traditions without breaking our family budget.

The good news is that by being creative and planning carefully, you can still make this season fun and memorable. Saving money does not equate to missing out on all the fun.

A good part of the budget is spent on purchasing food for Thanksgiving and Christmas, Passover or other religious holiday. The following budget-friendly tips can help you to save money and have fun at the same time.

- 1. Planning comes first.** Establish what your budget is and how much you can afford to spend. Design a menu around your budget and what is on special and seasonal at your grocery store. Next, write a list of who will be invited. Your budget will guide you on the number of guests you can comfortably invite.
- 2. Keep a grocery list.** Having a list makes it less likely you'll make an impulse purchase. It also saves gas for extra trips to the store in case you forget to purchase an item. Stick to your list for added savings, but stay flexible if you encounter a sale.

- 3. Plan ahead for how to use leftovers.** We lose money whenever we toss food because it spoiled. If leftovers go bad because they're left out too long, we're putting money into the garbage can. Make planning to avoid tossing foods a priority.
- 4. Coupons, coupons, coupons!** In most cases, grocery stores have great sales on holiday staples such as turkeys and hams. Their goal is to lure you into their stores with the hope you will purchase lots of other products that are not on sale. Use this to your advantage, but only buy

**Keep a grocery list.
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items you need. It doesn't hurt to visit more than one grocery store. Check for online coupons as well. Start with the Web site of the store where you shop or of products you use. Shopping on double or triple coupon days can save you a lot of money. Word of caution: Use coupons only for foods you plan to use, rather than for "extras."

- 5. Buy in bulk.** If the price is right and the larger size fits your criteria, go for it! Prices can be deceiving, so pay attention to unit prices to ensure you are getting the best deal. Bigger is not always cheaper. Make sure you

will use the food while the flavor is still good.

- 6. Save on store brands.** Buy generic and you could save up to 40 percent a year on your grocery bill. In taste tests, most consumers cannot identify the difference between generic and store brands.
- 7. Shop high and low.** Bargains are usually on the top or bottom shelves. The worst deals are at eye level (kids' eye level if you're in the cereal aisle).
- 8. Pay attention at the checkout.** Don't lose out on a great deal because an item scans incorrectly.
- 9. Ask for help.** If you are hosting a holiday gathering, ask for help with meal preparation. This will help relieve some of the financial burden. Contact everyone on your holiday guest list and see who can bring a dish to share. Guests traveling from out of town may not be able to bring perishable items, but they can grab some nonperishables on their way in. Make sure you coordinate who's bringing what to avoid an overlap.
- 10. Include a variety of meatless dishes.** These are usually cheaper and, as a bonus, generally healthier, too.

Finally, **save by serving the poor.** How about serving some homemade food or giving a grocery store gift certificate to a family in need? This is the greatest investment you can make for your money during the holiday season.

HOME & GARDEN

Compact fluorescent lights: A bright idea for your budget and the environment



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Switching from incandescent bulbs to compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) is an easy way to save on your energy bill and help the environment.

ENERGY STAR-qualified CFLs use up to 75 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs. They cost more, but last up to 10 times longer and will save \$30 or more in electric costs over their lifetime.

How do CFLs help the environment?

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports if every American home used just one CFL, it would save more than \$600 million in annual energy costs. This savings would be enough to light more than 3 million homes and would prevent release of greenhouse gases equivalent to emissions from 800,000 cars per year.

The main source of mercury emissions into our environment is from burning coal to produce electricity. Since CFLs use less electricity than incandescent bulbs, less mercury is released into the environment. Even though CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, it is significantly less than the mercury avoided by burning less coal.

Are CFLs dangerous?

CFLs contain very small amounts of mercury, an average of 4 milligrams. By comparison, older thermometers contain about 500 milligrams. In the past year, CFL manufacturers have

reduced mercury in the lights to as low as 1.4 milligrams. No mercury is released unless the bulb is broken.

What if a CFL breaks?

1. Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes.
2. Scoop up the glass with a piece of cardboard. Then wipe the area with damp paper towel.
3. Do not vacuum. Use sticky tape to pick up glass fragments from carpeting.
4. Seal glass pieces and paper towel in two plastic bags. Follow disposal guidelines for hazardous wastes.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports if every American home used just one CFL, it would save more than \$600 million in annual energy costs.

How do I dispose of CFLs?

The EPA recommends taking CFLs to a hazardous waste or recycling facility. Contact your solid waste agency for local recycling options.

The Home Depot and IKEA stores offer free consumer recycling for used, unbroken CFL bulbs. If no recycling facility is available, seal the bulb in two plastic bags and put it in your outside trash container. *Never incinerate fluorescent bulbs.*

Where should I use CFLs?

CFLs come in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors. Special bulbs are available for dimmer and three-way switches. Read the package to find the right bulb. A 25-watt CFL will replace a 100-watt incandescent bulb.

CFLs are sensitive to frequent on-off switching and high temperatures. They will last longest where lights are on 15 minutes or more and in fixtures or lamps with good air flow. High humidity in bathrooms may shorten the life.

Some CFLs have less mercury and a longer life. ENERGY STAR bulbs meet strict standards and have a limited two-year warranty. If a bulb burns out early, contact the manufacturer on the base for refund information. In the future, save receipts to document date of purchase.

CFLs are one of the efficient lighting options available to help you make saving energy, saving money and saving the environment as easy as changing a light bulb.

Resources:

ENERGY STAR, Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs:
www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

Mo. Dept. of Natural Resources:
1-800-361-4827
www.dnr.mo.gov/pubs/pub276.pdf

Your credit card: 8 things to know

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card companies could raise interest rates on previous balances. Under the new law, card holders must be at least 60 days late before the higher interest rate can apply to an *existing balance*. The Credit CARD Act eliminates the practice of universal default for existing balances. Borrowers may still have rates raised on future purchases for late payments on unrelated accounts or “anytime for any reason,” but they must be given 45 days’ notice.

5. **Fee changes.** Common credit card fees include late fees, over-the-limit fees, balance transfer fees and cash advance fees. Under the new law, consumers must be given 45 days’ notice before major contract changes, such as fees, take effect. Cardholders will no longer be subject to overlimit fees unless they permit the card issuer to approve overlimit transactions, and even then, only one overlimit fee per billing cycle can be applied.
6. **Fixed and variable rates.** Even if a credit card has a fixed rate, it may not be fixed forever. The Credit CARD Act requires card issuers to give customers 45 days’ notice if they change the interest rate on a fixed rate card. For variable rate credit cards, the issuer may change the interest rate without giving 45 days’ notice if the index to which the rate is tied has changed.
7. **Teaser rates.** Credit card companies sometimes use an introductory or “teaser” rate to get consumers to open an account. A “teaser” rate is a very low rate limited to a fairly short time. At the end of that time, the rate goes up to a standard rate. The Credit CARD Act requires credit card issuers to offer the introductory rate for at least a year.
8. **Extra fees.** Credit card companies may no longer charge fees to consumers who pay bills over the phone or online. They can still charge fees for expedited payments.

FAMILY LIFE

Be a role model to raise kind children

Children learn best by example. We as parents/caregivers can take simple actions to promote kindness and compassionate behavior in children.

- Help an elderly or disabled neighbor with chores.
- Give canned goods to a food bank or to a family in need.
- Say “please” and “thank you.”
- Be courteous to everyone.
- Express appreciation for kind behavior.
- Smile! Vote! Make your bed! Obey speed limits! Open the door for others!



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