

HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

Tips For Smart Holiday Shopping



(NAPSA)—The holidays bring family and friends, but they can sometimes also bring a bit too much spending. Everyone enjoys giving gifts to others, but setting and following a budget can be the best gift you can give yourself.

“It’s easy to get caught up in finding and then buying the perfect gift for our loved ones,” says Jon Dauphiné, Director of Economic Security Strategy at AARP. “Many of us feel like we have to give a gift to everyone in our lives, but there are ways to show appreciation and thoughtfulness without breaking the bank.”

The average amount of credit card debt in households with more than one card now tops \$8,000, according to CardWeb.com. That’s 167 percent more than the \$3,000 average for household incomes in 1990. That said, before you set foot in a mall or superstore, start planning for the holiday season. Grab a pad, a pencil and your latest bank statement and try these tips:

- **Set your budget.** Decide right now how much you can spend on holiday gifts when you go shopping. Also consider the cost of postage for cards and shipping gifts to friends and family who aren’t local. Be sure to add in the cost of holiday food, party clothes and extra fuel.

- **Make a list.** Write down a list of all the people you would like to give a gift to and what you might want to give them. List the estimated price of the gifts you might want to give.

- **Check it twice.** Do all the gifts on your list fit into your budget? Consider giving baked goods or sending holiday cards with meaningful notes to some people if you are over budget.

- **Hunt for a deal.** Skim the ads in the Sunday paper for sales and clip coupons for your favorite retailers. Look online for coupons or blogs that share information about little-known sales or great finds.

- **Stay focused.** You may want to shop with only the amount of cash needed to make your purchases. Credit cards make it easy to overspend in the moment and accumulate fees and interest that come back to bite many shoppers. Don’t charge more than what you can easily repay in full in a month or two.

- **Get help.** Online holiday calculators such as the ones at the Web sites www.bankrate.com and www.smartmoney.com can also be helpful in identifying costs that are often overlooked. For other ideas on budgets and planning, visit www.aarp.org.