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Living on Less: 20 Painless Ways to Cut Costs and Save Money

By **Rebecca Fairbanks**

Is your family budget showing you that you need to cut costs and save money, but you aren't sure where to begin? Here are twenty painless ways to cut costs and keep some of those dollars in your own pocket.

Takeaways

- Buying a good used car instead of new can save you thousands
- Quit the gym and take a walk or do some gardening instead
- Borrow books and magazines from the library instead of buying them

1 Hang laundry on the line
One of the best ways to cut your electricity costs is to hang your laundry on a line instead of using the clothes dryer. Estimates are that you can save approximately fifty cents to one dollar per load that you hang to dry. If you do not have a clothesline, or they are not allowed where you live, try using a drying rack in the house, or out on the porch or deck. Even hanging a few items on hangers on the shower rod will work.

2 Skip Starbucks
When heading out the door to work in the morning, take your own commuter mug of coffee with you. Skip the trip to Starbucks. Pocket the savings. If you don't mind it, you might even keep a jar of instant coffee and a container of powdered coffee creamer at your office.

3 Nix Netflix
Cancel your Netflix subscription. Don't buy videos. Don't rent as many either. Instead, borrow videos and dvds from your library. Most libraries have excellent selections about nature, travel, history, or topics to teach/entertain children.

4 Cut the cable
If you can, cut your cable subscription entirely. If this wouldn't work in your family, at least reduce your cable package by cutting out whatever premium channels you can live without.

5 Reduce phone expenses
Are there any extra phone services that you can do without? If you don't have teenagers in your home, could you get by without call waiting? How about Caller ID? Call forwarding? Consider switching to a cheaper plan for your long distance and/or cell phone too.

6 Buy a not-new car
Next time you need a car, pay cash for a good, used one instead of taking out a loan for a brand new one. You will keep thousands of dollars in your own pocket this way. Just driving a new car off the lot decreases the value by hundreds of dollars, yet you are still paying new-car price. Look for a clean, well maintained, pre-owned automobile to help you cut costs in your family budget.

7 Shop at thrift stores
If your children are growing out of clothing quickly and constantly, scout the thrift stores. You'll find excellent condition clothing there, as well as other household goods. Not only will you save a bundle, but once your children have outgrown those clothes, you can usually resell them at a consignment store.

8 Drink more water
Cut down or cut out soda. Drink more water. When you leave the house, grab a water bottle from the fridge instead of buying a soda. Helps your health and your wallet.

9 Give up the gym
Give up the gym membership, and take a walk or do some gardening instead. Or ride your bike or swim in your pool–whatever gets you moving. You could save up to hundreds of dollars in a year.

10 Barter babysitting
Instead of paying a babysitter every time you want to enjoy an evening out, try trading or bartering for babysitting. Trade equal hours with another mom, or barter a few hours of babysitting for some baked goods, veggies from your garden, maybe even some repair work on their car.

11 Movie night at home
Try renting a video and making pizza or popcorn at home. Saves you money, plus movies are much more enjoyable when you get to watch them in your pjs or sweats!

12 Don't do drive ups
Avoid the drive up windows when the children have sports practice or you go on errands. Take your own snacks and bottles of water with you when you leave the house. Have a small cooler that you can grab and go, if needed.

13 Hallmark hiatus

If you're crafty, try making greeting cards instead of going to the card store for every holiday. Family birthdays and anniversaries alone can cost you quite a bit. Custom crafted cards will be a hit with most family and friends. It'll save you some money, and help you use up some of that craft materials stockpile in the spare bedroom too.

14 Learn to love your library
Put yourself on a book buying break. Borrow from the library instead. Most libraries will allow you to reserve new releases and items on your "wish list". Take advantage, and save a few dollars at the same time.

15 Get your news online
These days, most major newspapers, and many smaller ones, are online so you can cancel your subscription and read the news online instead.

16 Go cold turkey on recreational shopping
Don't go "recreational shopping". Don't go to stores to wander around. If you need something specific, go, purchase your item, then leave. Staying home will do wonders for your budget.

17 Leave the magazines at the store
Don't purchase magazines. If you really enjoy them, borrow them from the library, or trade with family and friends.

18 Cook extra for the freezer
When you're cooking, make an extra pan for the freezer. On those nights when you come home from work exhausted, you'll be able to pull out a delicious, homemade dinner to pop into the oven. You'll save the money you would have spent on take out.

19 Leave your car at home
Whenever you can, try leaving your car at home while you walk or ride your bike on local errands. With gas prices these days, the savings could add up quickly each time you do it.

20 Trade tools
Instead of everybody in the neighborhood buying a hammer, a ladder, a snowblower, a mower, etc., try trading. Trade informally with friends and family, or set up a more formal arrangement among families in your neighborhood. Depending upon how often you do this, you could save quite a bit in a year or two.

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