



can exchange or replace the item if it's faulty. Keep your receipts.

- Avoid high-interest store cards.
- If you're buying online, reduce your risk by sticking with reputable retailers and use a card with a low limit.
- Those credit card 'minimum monthly repayments' are a costly trap. Pay off your total balance even if you have to tighten up on other areas of spending.
- Check out offers of 'no payment or interest due for 12 months'. Read the fine print. Find out what the item would cost if you paid cash now. Some shops will load up the price of an item to offset lost interest payments, or whack you with fees as part of your repayments.

Get creative

A strategy in keeping with the times is to get off the tinsel treadmill. Rather than buying presents, try one of these options. I call this giving from the heart:

- Home-baked or hand-crafted gifts are a real treat in a time-starved world.
- Give time. Babysitting for example.
- Instead of buying a gift, give the equivalent amount to charity.

Plan ahead

To avoid overspending, the best thing is forward planning. Here are some ways to be less stressed this time next year.

- Save early for next Christmas! Early in the New Year resolve to set up a separate account and feed it with an automatic payment each month to cover next year's holiday and expenses.
- There are more than 365 shopping days until next Christmas! Buy gifts at discounts during the year – you'll have a nice stash of well thought-out gifts by end of year. ☑



Yule rules

Forget feeling like Scrooge – you can trim costs *and* have fun at Christmas, says Finance Editor Susanna Stuart

CHRISTMAS SPENDING is upon us. Here's how to manage the money pressure to keep both festive and fiscal.

Set limits

First, agree some rules with the family about present buying. Set clear limits. One suggestion is to try a secret Santa where everyone gives one gift to a nominated person. Or follow a food theme. And embrace religion – religiously stick to a budget.

Shop smarter

Don't leave shopping to Christmas Eve. Panic is the enemy of prudence.

- Stay focused and don't be distracted. Shop by yourself.
- Use shops that provide a free wrapping service.
- Buy bulk goods such as nuts and chocolates, and then package these into individual jars or packets with ribbons and colourful paper.
- Support charities by buying their Christmas cards or calendars.
- Support retailers who allow people to exchange the gift if it's not to their taste.
- Avoid risks and pitfalls; look at the shop's return policies. Make sure you

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