



LOWER YOU'RE DEBT WITH A WRITTEN SPENDING PLAN

The beginning of a new year is a time when people make resolutions that they believe will make their lives better. Some resolve to lose weight; others vow to become more organized or to begin an exercise program to improve health.

If getting finances in control and lowering debt is a new year's resolution, consumers should resolve to develop a written spending plan, said Sissy Osteen, Oklahoma State University Cooperative Extension Service resource management specialist.

"January is a time of renewal, starting over and developing good habits," Osteen said. "If you over-indulged with credit cards during the holidays, you'll see the effects of it when the holiday bills arrive in the mail when the season is over. Developing and sticking to a written spending plan is one way to help control debt."

Putting a plan in writing is a good way to start communication among household members. A written plan provides direction, helps change verbal agreements for needed adjustment in spending into a visual picture of the financial situation and it is more structured than a verbal plan. Research shows that writing a goal down helps ensure that it will be accomplished.

To assist with putting together a written spending plan, forms are available at local OSU Cooperative Extension offices, or by calling 405-744-6282. Ask for Fact Sheet T-4149, "The Financial Puzzle: Putting the Pieces Together."

"When putting a spending plan into action to combat credit card debt you must prioritize all of your debt. Secured loans such as your mortgage or car payment must be paid first to avoid repossession or foreclosure," she said.

"Consumers can run the risk of losing their property if these debts fall behind schedule. After your secured loans are paid, prioritize all remaining debts."

Consumers will save money if they pay off higher interest credit cards first. However, paying off lower balances first can give a person the feeling of accomplishment.

"This helps make consumers feel their debts aren't insurmountable," she said. "It can actually help motivate them to get other debts paid off more quickly. Once one debt is paid off, apply that payment to other payments. This is often referred to as the 'snowball' effect."

Some families may need to enlist the help of non-profit organizations such as Consumer Credit Counseling Services. CCCS offers budget counseling, debt repayment plans and works with creditors to possibly reduce payments and lower or eliminate interest and fees. These services are offered for no fee or very low fees. To locate the nearest CCCS office, call 1-800-388-CCCS (2227) or check online at www.NFCC.org.

Osteen said the final step in developing and implementing a spending plan is to start a reserve account for next year. This account is for all occasional expenses during the year, such as gifts, insurance, home maintenance, travel and taxes.

"If you don't set aside money for these occasional expenses you will continue to go into debt or your attempts to get out of debt will be spoiled," she said. "Developing good habits and sticking with them will get you on track for this year and many years to come."

SELF-DISCIPLINE WHEN USING CREDIT CARDS



When credit cards are used wisely, they can be useful financial tools. But if used carelessly, credit cards can cause serious financial problems.

Advantages of credit cards include:

- Buying goods at a temporary sale price
- Convenience and safety (no need to carry large amounts of cash)
- Buying items you need but can't afford to pay for immediately

Disadvantages to using credit cards include:

- Buying more than you need because it's so simple to say "charge it"
- Shopping where you have credit instead of comparison shopping for the best price
- Forming a habit of using credit cards
- Paying 20 percent or more for an item through service charges

Many families use credit to make ends meet, then find it hard to make all the monthly payments. Keep track of what you charge to eliminate end-of-the-month surprises. If you have trouble meeting your monthly obligations, cut back on using credit. Pay cash instead. If you have a hard time avoiding impulse buying, leave the credit cards at home. You may need to close some accounts and cut up your cards.

Finding ways to reduce spending to pay off credit card debt is difficult and requires self-discipline. Try to include everyone in the family in the effort: eating out less, buying cheaper clothes, or waiting to buy a CD. The more that family member's work together, the more likely you will succeed.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION A PLAN FOR CHANGE

It's a New Year and another chance to make New Year's Resolutions. But will it also be another opportunity for disappointment?

The word "resolute" has the same origin as the work solution. To make a resolution is to reexamine a problem, break it into parts and arrive at a solution. A true resolution is more of a plan than a final goal.

Often we want to look at the big picture more than we do the little brush strokes it takes to paint it. Try setting a goal just for tomorrow that helps you toward your final goal. After achieving a few daily goals, you might be ready to take on a weekly resolution.

It's important that the goals, in whatever time frame you set, are within your reach. If not, failure is likely. Failure leads to discouragement, the biggest obstacle to achievement. If you are having a problem with a child, look at all parts of the problem and decide what part can be changed to provide positive results.

Focus on an action you can take, not on someone else's behavior. It is far better to promise yourself "to spend 10 minutes after work tomorrow, playing with my son," than to say, "Tomorrow, my son will behave better."

Be specific. Vague action goals give little direction and provide few opportunities for achievement. Saying, "I'm going to be nice to my children" is not as effective as saying, "Tomorrow, I will read my children a bedtime story."



Make resolutions with actions or brush strokes that take you toward your final goal, your big picture. Don't let minor problems get in the way.

All journeys are completed one step at a time. So it is with goals that help families grow and become healthy. And often, big goals start with little steps.

PORTION DISTORTION QUIZ

French Fries

20 Years Ago

Today



2.4 ounces
210 calories

??? Calories

2.4 ounces of French fries of 20 years ago had 210 calories. How many calories do you think are in today's portion?

- 610
- 590
- 650

Check Your Answer on Page 3.

WHAT SIZE IS YOUR SERVING?

The difference between a serving size and a portion size can be confusing? A serving size is the recommended amount of food to eat at one time from each of the food groups. A portion size is the amount of food you choose to eat at any one time and may be or less than a serving.

A healthy diet calls for more than just choosing healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy products. It also means looking how much you are eating. Bigger food portions have more calories. More calories may cause weight gain and being overweight can put you at risk for heart disease, diabetes and some cancers.

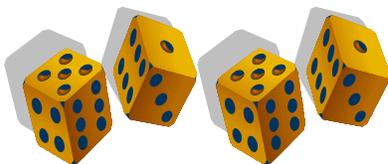
PORTION CONTROL TIPS:

- Read food labels
- Measure label servings to see their sizes
- Use smaller plates and bowls
- Limit eating out
- Avoid “super-sizing”
- Share an order with a friend
- Take leftovers

COMPARE THE MYPYRAMID SERVING SIZES WITH YOUR OWN...



Compact Disk = 1 pancake



Four Dice = 1 serving of cheese (1 ounce)
One Dice = 1 tsp. margarine or spreads



Baseball = 1 bagel or 1 serving of pasta, rice, cereal
1 cup of salad



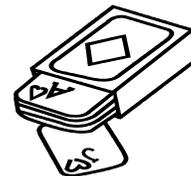
Computer Mouse = 1 medium potato



Tennis Ball = 1 serving of fruit or vegetables



2 Cassette Tapes = 2 servings of bread



Deck of Cards = 1 serving of meat, chicken or fish

ANSWER: Today's 6.9 ounce portion of French fries has 610 calories. This is 400 more calories than a 2.4 oz portion 20 years ago.

CHOCTAW COUNTY OHCE

UPCOMING PROGRAMS:

NOTE: The date has been changed for January
Wednesday, January 11th
12:00 noon
OSU Extension Office

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

Presenter: Barbara Elkins
FCS Extension Educator,
Coal County



ALL LOCAL AND COUNTY OHCE OFFICERS
ARE ENCOURAGED TO ATTEND!

DEADLINE: All OHCE award applications are due
on Jan 11th.

Monday, Feb. 20th
10:00 a.m.

OSU Extension Office
**COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING &
ANNUAL OHCE AWARDS PROGRAM**



12:00 noon
CREATIVE CENTERPIECES
Presenter: Nancy Tucker
FCS Extension Educator
Pushmataha County

LOCAL CLUBS & MEETING SCHEDULES

BUCKHORN

2nd Tuesday of the month
Contact Person: Anne Page

BOSWELL

2nd Monday of the month
Contact Person: Mary Duke

HUGO

3rd Monday of the month
Contact Person: Linda Knight

LOV-N-OHCE

3rd Tuesday of the month
Contact Person: Sherry Cheek
cheek-sl@yahoo.com



BUCKHORN OHCE receives 2005 Choctaw Co.
OHCE Club of the Year. Accepting the award on
behalf of Buckhorn OHCE is Anne Page, club
President.

Nutrition & Food Preparation Classes

Held every Monday
10:00 a.m.
Choctaw Co. Library, Hugo



Presented by the OSU
Cooperative Extension Service
and the Community Nutrition
Education Program (CNEP).

Family & Consumer Science Newline is published as one way of
communicating educational information to the citizens of Choctaw
County:



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County Web Page:

<http://www.county.okstate.edu/choctaw/>

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