FWi
FINANCIAL WELLNESS INSTITUTE
Strengthening families. Strengthening communities.

"Dedicated to helping families live within their means and prepare for homeownership."

READY, SET, SAVE!

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 2 SUMMER 2024

IN THIS ISSUE:

IS YOUR BUDGET GETTING YOU DOWN?

Budgeting can be disappointing and seem like a chore, but it is your most important road map for achieving success.
Without following a budget, you risk running out of money before your next pay period and it will alter your plans for buying a home or a car. These situations are not far-fetched, since 62% of Americans live paycheck to paycheck.

It is daunting to hear repeatedly that we all need a budget. It may seem like you never have the time to work on one or put it into motion. However, budgeting will make you more aware of where your money goes each month, and it allows you to plan for emergencies and those big-ticket items you may need. Budgeting is your path to establishing long-term financial stability. Remember, the more you stick to it the more it becomes a habit.

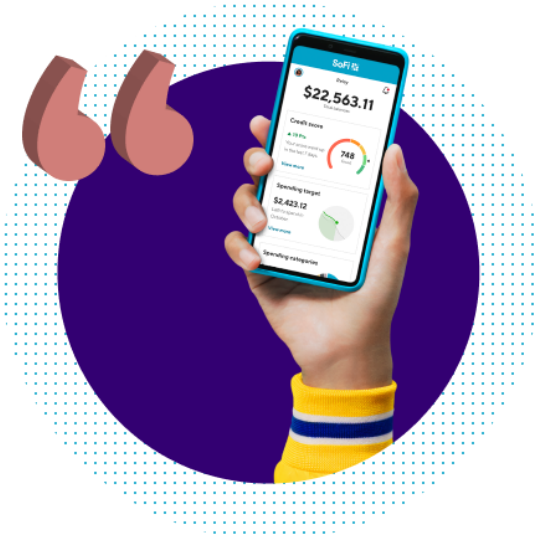
Consider budgeting as a tool that helps you get more of what you want and helps you in those financial emergencies that we all experience from time to time. A budget can reveal what you are overspending on so you can tighten your spending and put more money into that emergency fund or a miscellaneous fund for travel or something else you want. The key to being successful at budgeting is to focus on the benefits of budgeting rather than the sacrifices. The more positively you see budgeting, the easier it will be to stick to it.

Continue...

IS YOUR BUDGET GETTING YOU DOWN?

Continued...

For some, it is helpful to use technology to set goals, track progress and hold yourself accountable. There are several free budgeting tool ideas out there, you just need to do the research to find one that suits you. Some of the free apps have tools to help make it easier to reduce your expenses. “TRIM” (asktrim.com) can identify subscriptions and cancel the ones you don’t need, and BILLSHARK negotiates rates with monthly service providers for you.



Here are 5 FREE budgeting apps:

1. **Sofi Insights** – is an online app offering a budget planner and money tracker. It enables you to link all your bank accounts so you can keep a close eye on your spending. It will help identify wasteful spending and provides you with your most current VantageScore credit score. You can get access to a free 30-minute phone session with one of Sofi’s in-house financial planners.
2. **Debt Payoff Planner** – is a great way to track your debt. They offer a FREE version and a subscription, but the FREE service will do the trick for most. It will allow you to create your own plan, and the app will show the impact of making extra payments on your debts.
3. **Goodbudget** – is an app that encourages the classic envelope system, with you determining the amount of money to be spent in certain categories. When special events or holidays are on the horizon, you can easily move funds around in order to be prepared for the upcoming costs. You create your budget for what is important to you.
4. **Webull** – is a portfolio tracking software that only tracks your investments. There is no minimum account size, so you can start small and it offers commission-free trading. It’s pretty simple and you can start investing and trading immediately if you have the funds to do so.
5. **Zogo Finance** – helps you understand your money habits. It was developed for young adults, but anyone can use it to improve their knowledge base and get rewarded along the way. It offers hundreds of financial education modules such as car buying and credit development. When you take and pass a class you earn rewards that you can redeem for gift cards to retailers like Amazon or Target. They also offer daily trivia questions as another way of earning rewards and keeping you involved in the financial education process.

Try out a few apps out before making a final decision on what works best for you!

Let's Talk Water

Water is one of the most precious natural resources on the planet, and it is essential to sustaining life (humans, animals and plants). Do you know that the average family uses about 300 gallons of water per day? Did you know that less than 1% of all water on Earth can be used by people? The rest is salt water or is frozen and we can't drink it, wash with it, or use it to water plants.

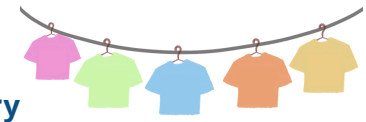
As the world's population continues to grow, more and more people are using this limited resource. It is very important that we use water wisely and try not to waste it. Conserving water at home can make a big difference over time and will reduce your monthly budget. There are simple practices to help your family reduce your water usage and help protect our water supply!

Turn Off That Tap

We all have left that tap running while brushing our teeth, especially the kids, right? Just by turning off the tap while brushing your teeth (morning and night) can save as much as four to eight gallons of water! That could potentially save about 200 gallons a month. The same is true when washing the dishes. Scrape the dishes off in the trash, rinse if necessary (but turn off that tap between the rinse) – then place in dishwasher.

Shorter Showers

Baths take up to 70 gallons of water, taking a shower uses much less water than filling up a bathtub. If you do take a bath, plug the drain right away and adjust the temperature as you fill the tub. To save even more water, keep your shower short-try timing yourself with a stopwatch next time you hop in! Instruct the kids to do the same. If you tell them why, they are more likely to buy into the water saving techniques.



Let's Talk Laundry

Saving water when doing laundry is good for your wallet and the planet. Follow these tips:

1. Only wash when you have a full load (same for the dishwasher)
2. Adjust the water level and temperature to suit the size and type of load
3. Use the economy settings (if your machine has them)
4. Pre-treat stains to avoid having to rewash
5. Wash using cold water as much as possible
6. If you must replace your washing machine, choose a front loader that is a 6-star WELS rated machine. Front loaders use half the water compared to a top loader.

Got Leaks?

Dripping faucets and other leaks can cause damage to your home and they also waste water. Take the time to replace those washers in your faucets and check your pipes for leaks. It's not uncommon to experience leaks from a faucet or old toilet flapper. Both are relatively inexpensive to fix, and you should be able to manage the repair yourself. Fixing easily corrected household water leaks can reduce water waste and your water bill.

Recycle Leftover Water

We are all guilty of forgetting that half-empty glass of water on the counter, or visitors/guests not finishing their glass of water. There are many ways we may find ourselves faced with leftover water from time to time. Instead of pouring it down the drain, recycle it! Use it to water plants, add to the birdbath, or your garden. This simple small thing can make a big difference.

Eating Meat Free

Do you know that one pound of beef can take up to 4,000 gallons of water to produce, but one pound of vegetables only requires 39 gallons of water? Who knew! Incorporating meat-free meals into your weekly rotation can save a surprising amount of water. Try making a hearty soup or stir fry one night a week to start and see how the family will adapt. Not only will you save water, but you will be offering up a more healthy and cost effective meal.

RELATED: How to eat less meat (without missing it)

DIY IDEAS FOR SUMMER

Weed Killer

Is your yard overgrown with weeds or grass that you want to eliminate permanently? Try this homemade weed killer with vinegar, salt and Dawn dish detergent. This three-ingredient weed, grass and vegetation killer is non-toxic and easy to make.

If you are trying to kill a large area of vegetation you can start by covering the area with cardboard or wet newspaper to smother it. Depriving the grass and weeds of light and fresh air will kill the plans and make it easier to dig up their roots.

Weed Killer Recipe

- 1 quart of vinegar (minimum of 5% acidity)
- 2 cups of salt (iodized or un-iodized)
- ¼ cup dish detergent (blue Dawn is the favorite)
- Spray bottle

Heat the vinegar in a pan or stove until it is hot, but not boiling. Add the salt slowly and stir in with a wisk until it is dissolved. Let the mixture cool slightly. Add the Dawn dish soap to your sprayer then slowly pour in the vinegar mixture.

Tip: The higher the acidity in the vinegar, the more quickly it will kill your weeds!

Got Ants?

If you find ants in your house, no need to reach for toxic poisons to eliminate them. Instead, safely and naturally get rid of the ants. Not only will it start working right away, but it will keep working so the ants do not reappear.

Ant Away Vinegar Spray

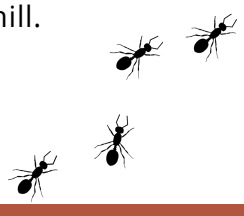
- 16-ounce glass spray bottle
- 1 cup of white vinegar
- 1 cup of lemon juice

Combine the vinegar and lemon juice in the glass spray bottle and gently shake to combine. Spray around windows, doors and wherever you see ants enter your home. You can also use it directly on the ants.

Ant-Be-Gone Essential Oil Spray

- 4-ounce glass spray bottle
- 4 ounces of white vinegar
- 15 drops of peppermint essential oil

Combine all ingredients in the glass bottle and shake gently to mix. Spray as needed anywhere you see ants. Repeat as needed. Ants do not like cinnamon either. If you see ants in your window sills, place a cinnamon stick, or a cottonball with cinnamon essential oil, there to deter them. For outside ant hills, sprinkle cinnamon on the ant hill.



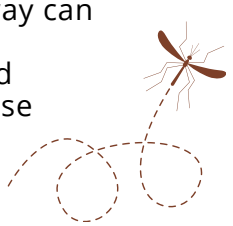
Homemade Mosquito Spray

Mosquitoes are a pesky bug disliked by many. For a non-toxic DIY repellent see below. This spray is completely chemical free, just be sure to test it on the children to make sure they do not have a negative reaction to the oils. (Always use a glass spray bottle when using essential oils.)

- 2oz water or distilled water
- 2oz Apple Cider Vinegar or Witch Hazel
- 20-55 drops of Bug-Away Oil (available on Amazon) (has citronella, lavender, lemongrass and eucalyptus)

If you are using it mainly for the children or using it to spray on clothing just use the 20 drops. Use the 55 drops if you are going into a heavily infested area. Another benefit of this spray is that it does not smell like most mosquito repellents.

To repel bugs in your yard, Epsom Sale Mosquito Yard Spray can used:



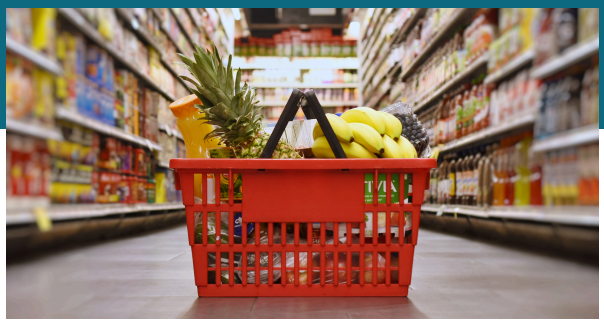
- 2 cups mint-flavored MOUTHWASH (we use Listerine)
- 2 cups EPSOM SALT
- 2 cups BEER

Directions:

1. Place all the ingredients into a large bowl and then mix with a spoon until the Epsom salt is dissolved.
2. Use a funnel to pour the solution into spray bottles (this makes 48 oz.)
3. Spray all around the yard, especially anywhere you plan to be outside.

Note: Letting the Epsom salt dissolve completely will displace some of the volume (roughly 15% less volume), but it will spray out evenly. It will be easier to handle a 24-oz bottle vs. the 48-oz one, so consider two 24-oz bottles. This solution should not harm your yard or our friendly bees. In fact, some say that the Epsom salt helps the grass grow greener (do not spray on flowers).

GROCERY SHOPPING - TIPS TO STAY ON BUDGET



Is Your Weekly Grocery Shopping Topping the Charts?

Don't feel alone, with prices up 12%+ from last year, everyone is feeling the effects of high grocery prices. With staple foods like eggs, beef, and milk significantly higher, grocery expenses add up fast and it does not take long to break a budget. The increased prices mean that if your grocery bill was typically $500 a month, it's now stretched to $560. With kids now out of school, that will add even more to your food bill.

There are ways to still spend less on groceries and still put nutritious meals on the table. Try these tips to cut back on costs at the grocery store.

- **Make a List**

Planning meals helps save money. It helps avoid impulse buying and allows planning meal purchases around weekly advertised specials. Making your dinner plans (plus a few lunches and breakfasts) for the week, allows you to cook at home and eliminate takeout on your busy days. Your plan does not need to be complex, but have a few recipes written down or search Pinterest for some meal ideas, then shop for the necessary ingredients. It is a great strategy to help save money at the store, but you need to stick to the plan to stay on budget.

- **Pick Your Produce Wisely**

We were all told while growing up that we need to eat more fruits and vegetables. While both seem to be a bit pricy, there are ways to stretch your food dollar so you can incorporate them into your diet. Canned, dried, or even frozen fruits and vegetables are great ways to save money and still get the vitamins, minerals, and fiber into your diet. Look for the items labeled lower in added sugar and salt. You can swap out more expensive fruits or vegetables with cheaper items. You could choose cabbage and turn it into slaw, instead of a mixed green salad. You can also use onions instead of shallots in a recipe or select frozen fruit berries instead of fresh for your morning smoothie.

If visiting your local farmer's market, go as late as possible and you may snag some fresh produce at a lower price because they don't want to lug it home. Freeze what you do not consume right away.

- **Watch for Sales**

If you are already adept at using coupons or the weekly sales flyers, you are on the right track. Most grocery stores offer coupons you can clip or load onto your store card. Try to incorporate some of the sale items into your weekly meal planning.

If you use a grocery delivery or pickup service, add virtual coupons to your order or filter products by what's on sale. If your grocery store offers reward points, be sure to sign up!

Note: Grocers usually will not give you a rain check on digital coupon items.

- **Inventory Your Pantry and Freezer**

Inventory your freezer and pantry before meal planning and shopping. Using what you have on hand before you make a list and go shopping can help you save money, it also helps to save space in your pantry. Use foods up from the freezer before they spoil or end up with freezer burn.

- **Shop by Checking Unit Prices**

If you are unfamiliar with unit pricing, get informed. The unit price is usually displayed on the shelf next to the price of the item and allows you to compare sizes and brands.

Think about the cereal your family consumes every week. It might make sense to buy the bigger box, which may cost more at the time, but it will be cheaper per pound than the smaller box item. The unit cost will reveal the cost based on weight, and smaller sizes cost more. Compare different brands that offer different sized packages and then find the one that makes the most sense.

- **Shop Multiple Stores**

Most of us have favorite stores, but switching or using multiple stores can help you save. Not everyone can do this - but if you can, you may be able to save money. Grocery stores offer certain foods for less and that differs by store. It will take more time and effort to shop around but it will reduce your grocery bill.

Continue...

GROCERY SHOPPING

Continued...

• Reduce "Convenience Food" Use

Convenience foods cost more – think pre-cut vegetable/produce or frozen meals. Sometimes those convenience items pay off, and it means eating at home instead of takeout (no tip required). But too many of them can throw off our budget and our heath.

We all get pressed for time and need a little help putting dinner on the table from time to time, so what could be done instead? You could meal prep on the weekend when you have extra time. There are many freezer meal recipes you can search for that can just be popped into your crockpot on low so it will be ready when you get home. Add a salad or warm bread and you have a meal. **BOOM!**

SUN = UV RAYS, BE PROTECTED

Given how much we all look forward to summer, it's easy to overlook the fact that we need to protect our skin. Most skin cancers are caused by too much ultraviolet (UV) light. UV rays are an invisible kind of radiation that comes from the sun, tanning beds, and sunlamps. UV rays can damage skin cells. Using sunscreen regularly can reduce wrinkles, slow the effects of aging and protect from the development of cancer.

The good news is that you can reduce your risk of sun damage and skin cancer by staying in the shade, under an umbrella, tree, or any other shelter. The best advice to protect your skin is to use sunscreen or wear protective clothing when you are outside-even when you're in the shade.

Recent concerns about sunscreen ingredients have made it more difficult to choose a safe one. The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit organization, says about 75% of sunscreens on the market provide inferior sun protection or have worrisome ingredients.

So how do you find a sunscreen that is organic/natural and non-toxic but offers you the protection that your skin needs from UV rays? When looking for a sunscreen, look for fewer ingredients overall. Stick with non-nano zinc and titanium particles until more is known about the effects of nanoparticles and look for a product with no parabens and no fragrance. Beware of essential oils because they oxidize in the sunlight, which can cause a skin reaction. An SPF of 30 is probably sufficient, and you still should wear a hat and long sleeves when you are out in the sun for prolonged periods (don't forget to protect your neck, ears, and nose also).

Most dermatologists will tell you that the best sunscreen is any sunscreen, but we can do better than that. Look for natural sunscreen ingredients that aren't harmful for humans or the environment. The one ingredient to avoid is oxybenzone. Here are 7 tips from dermatologists for choosing a sunscreen this summer:

1. **Choose a Mineral-Based Sunscreen** - Look for a sunscreen with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, those are the only sunscreen ingredients that the FDA says are generally safe and effective.
2. **Is it Reef-Safe** - Research shows that some chemicals in sunscreen can be toxic to coral and other marine organisms. Keep in mind, that those terms are not regulated by the FDA, so you should check the ingredients to ensure they don't contain oxybenzone or octinoxate.
3. **Choose an SPF of at Least 30** - Select a sunscreen with an SPF 30 or higher, which blocks 97% of the sun's UVB rays. SPF over 30 are only slightly more effective, so don't fall for the high SPF's thinking you are totally protected.
4. **Use Broad Spectrum** - Sunscreens that are labeled "broad spectrum" will ensure that you will be protected against UVB rays, which causeS sunburns, and can cause wrinkles and aging. But some labeled as "broad spectrum" do not protect as well as promised against UVA and UVB rays so do your research before you buy.
5. **Apply Properly** - Most people apply only about 20-50% of the amount of sunscreen they need to achieve the amount of SPF on the label. You need about one ounce-or enough to fill a shot glass-to cover your entire body. Use one teaspoon for your face and neck, one teaspoon on each arm and two on each leg. That gives you the labeled amount of protection. Mose people only apply about a quarter to a half of what is suggested. Reapply every two hours or after swimming. Don't forget your back, neck, face, ears and the top of your feet. You can apply it to your hair part on your scalp too!

Check BEST REVIEWS for sunscreens: https://bestreviews.com/search?q=sunscreen

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SUMMER ICEBOX BERRY CAKE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups fresh blueberries
- 3 cups fresh strawberries, sliced
- 12 oz Cool Whip
- 2oz white chocolate chips
- 19 oz. Graham Crackers
- 8 oz. Cream Cheese, softened
- 2 ½ cups cold Milk
- 2 (3.4oz) boxes Vanilla Instant Pudding

DIRECTIONS

1. Beat the cream cheese and dry putting mixes in a large bowl with a mixer until blended.
2. Gradually beat in milk.
3. Gently stir in Cool Whip (reserving ½ cup).
4. Spread a thin layer of cool whip in a 9x13 pan just to coat the bottom (the reserved ½ cup).
5. Layer 5 graham crackers across the center of the pan, then 2 more, breaking them as needed to fit around the top and bottom edges.
6. Spread a layer of pudding mixture over the grahams and top with a layer of blueberries and sliced strawberries.
7. Place graham crackers on top of the berries, then pudding mixture, then a layer of berries again.
8. Repeat the graham-pudding berries layers 1 more time (3 times total) and you should reach the top of the pan.
9. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours or overnight until the graham crackers have softened.
10. When ready to serve, melt the white chocolate chips in a bowl as directed on package and drizzle over dessert. You can use a spoon to drizzle it over the tops of the berries or you can put it into a small zip-lock bag and snip a corner for easy piping. **Enjoy!**

RECIPE

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