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Romance on a Budget

Show your love and save some money in the process

When love is in great abundance but money is in short supply, you may find yourself wanting to get creative for your next date night. Whether you're celebrating Valentine's Day or no occasion in particular, having a romantic evening with the person you love most can be easily done without breaking your budget.

Stay in and prepare a restaurant-quality meal

Eating out at a nice restaurant is a popular way to celebrate Valentine's Day — but it can get expensive fast. On top of the price of the actual meal, you'll have to factor in things like transportation, parking, and add-ons like wine and cocktails.

Rather than drop a day's worth of income on a fancy dinner, why not plan out a homemade meal for a fraction of the cost? Consider your partner's favorite dishes of choice, look up a few recipes from the experts, and put together a shopping list. You'll find that you're spending significantly less money, and you're putting forth a meal made with love.

If cooking is a shared passion, Money Crashers' Sarah Graves recommends using that as the foundation for a memorable date night. While preparing a meal for your partner is plenty romantic, creating a meal as a team is quality time that makes your date unforgettable. Graves suggests putting a twist on your time in the kitchen by having a cook-off where you each prepare the same meal, doing a blind taste test, or taking part in an online cooking class together.



Spend time, not money

It's easy to associate romance with spending money, because romance is about doing things out of the ordinary. But doing something special can mean something simple if you and your partner are both busy and have a hard time making time.

You can easily build a romantic day with your partner that won't see so much as a dime leaving your account. Bustle contributor Raven Ishak recommends cost-free activities like going to the library or a local museum, having a picnic in the park, or just having a conversation where you catch up with one another.

Ishak also recommends trying your hand at writing a poem that expresses your feelings for that special person or giving them a massage to help relieve tension. Graves builds on the idea of a massage by suggesting putting together a full spa night — complete with fresh, warm towels, relaxing music, rose petals, and a bubble bath.

Another great way to be romantic with your partner is to indulge in your favorite hobbies. If you like to play board games or video games, Graves suggests that setting aside the time one evening to cooperate or challenge each other can hit the spot and even lead to a new weekly ritual.

Keep it simple

A romantic evening isn't about how much money you spend — it's about what you do together. Reader's Digest contributor Cates Holmes writes that you can save money and enjoy a memorable night out by opting for cost-effective alternatives to high-cost dates.

Rather than go to a high-end restaurant, Holmes posits that you could eat at the new food truck that opened up in your city. Instead of getting more expensive tickets for a touring Broadway show, check out the show put on by your local theater company.

Don't be afraid to take great deals and turn them into gold, either. Holmes notes that dining out when there's a good special on doesn't cheapen the magic of spending time together with your partner. And if you're not already using a service like Honey or Groupon, you could save even more on your next night out.

If you have a passion for saving, you can do your next date night and save bundles of money. And by putting that money away, you and your partner can save up for a well-deserved splurge like a cozy vacation for two or a new happy home for your growing family.

IBEW & UNITED WORKERS FEDERAL CREDIT UNION

KEEPING CURRENT- JANUARY 2022

THE EVOLVING FACE OF FRAUD AND HOW TO AVOID BEING A VICTIM!

By: Barbara Mathey, IBEW & United Workers Federal Credit Union

We have talked about fraud scams in several articles over the years. Unfortunately, fraud continues to be a major problem and threat and the schemes continue to modify and evolve. Most of us have become frequent users of electronic research, shopping, and communication. The use of electronic channels seems to have made us more vulnerable to this activity. At the Credit Union we see fraud and suspicious activity daily, so it is important for us to share some of the scams that are happening more frequently and causing losses to our members and to the Credit Union. It is our wish to keep everyone from becoming a victim and we encourage you to be vigilant and cautious.

- Over the last few months, we have seen cases of what we would call device and/or account “take-over,” where a member receives a call from someone alleging a problem with their computer and an offer to fix the problem. These calls may come from someone identifying a connection with Windows or Microsoft. The caller then goes through a list of personal questions, obtains the answers and gains access, and takes control of the member’s equipment and accounts. We have had to close membership accounts and some members have had to totally replace their computer and phone equipment. Do not accept anyone’s unexpected offer to “fix your computer” remotely. People making these calls have no honest knowledge of a problem with your computer
- People calling and posing as the IRS or Unemployment office saying your social security number is being used by someone else. They then ask for personal information and or account information to “verify” your identity. State or Federal government offices will never do that.
- If you are on a website and it starts to re-direct you to another site, exit out unless you are very certain that the secondary site is valid. It is always best to exit and sign into another site directly.
- Never give out information when someone calls and asks for your credit union or bank account information even if they say they are from the institution. Unless you are waiting for a return call and you can truly identify the caller, do not give out any information. Hang up and call the institution directly.
- Someone calls and tells you that if you let them have access to your phone and/or computer they can help you to detect problems or improve the efficiency. This is designed to allow them to gain access to all the private information stored on these devices and to allow them to use your phone in the future for costly foreign calls.
- Use great caution when looking at “pop-up” ads when you are online or on social media. Many of these are fraudulent and designed to obtain your personal information including credit card numbers. You may not get the items you thought you were purchasing, and you may see fraudulent charges appearing on your card. Get out of these ads and look for the items on a reputable site that you are familiar with.
- Check out any site that is asking for donations for the new causes that have come about with the current community challenges. Research the charities with “Charity Navigator” or the State Attorney General’s office. Be sure your money is going where you intended it to go.
- Never open an email from someone you do not know and are not expecting and if you open the email, do not open an attachment that may contain malware.
- We have also had members coming into the Credit Union lately asking us to wire money to a “boyfriend or girlfriend” in a foreign country they met online. These scams are particularly cruel since they target older, lonely individuals and they ask for large sums of money.
- Finally, do not fall for the age-old Nigerian fraud schemes telling you of an inheritance or a lottery win that is waiting for you. NEVER send money that they “require” so that your “winnings” can be sent to you. These scams usually target older people, so please educate your vulnerable family members.

We have members that have been taken advantage of as a result of every one of these items. We encourage you to be extremely cautious and to teach other family members and children not to give out confidential information over the phone. Remember, if it seems too good to be true—it is!

On another note, your Credit Union is planning for 2022 and we are looking at enhancing our services to add greater security and convenience for all of our members. In 2022, expect to see new loan products, expanded ways to contact us and conduct secure transactions, a streamlined way of applying for, getting loan approvals, and obtaining new plastic cards. Finally, we will be doing all of this with an expanded, caring, and well-trained staff dedicated to providing exceptional member service.

HOLIDAY CLOSINGS:

January 17, 2022 - Martin Luther King Jr. Day

February 21, 2022 - Presidents Day

Checks and Balances: Balancing Your Checkbook

Keep your checkbook in order and stay on top of your money

Balancing a checkbook has been shorthand for financial responsibility for generations. While it's always been presented as a laborious, unenviable task, keeping your money in order is fairly simple as long as you stick to a routine. Since so much of our world is now paperless and digital, balancing your checkbook is easier than ever.

Use online banking to your advantage

Chances are good that your financial institution offers a mobile app that lets you easily perform tasks like checking your balances. Forbes Advisor Emily Guy Birken recommends checking your statement balance daily, which gives you an idea of what your running balance is. This allows you to stay on top of unexpected transactions like recurring annual payments and spot fraudulent activity.

Birken also notes that most financial institutions offer you the option of signing up for email and text alerts. This feature allows you to track all transactions and can keep you apprised of your account balance.

Your mobile banking app and alerts may mean that you can stay on top of your checking account without ever needing to put a pen to paper. But if you have multiple accounts or simply want an additional layer of confidence, Birken suggests account aggregator tools like Mint that track multiple accounts — even across different financial institutions.

If you prefer a more formal approach akin to the pen-and-paper method, Birken suggests maintaining an open-source spreadsheet like Google Sheets or using a dedicated accounting program like Quicken.

The classic approach offers greater confidence

Sometimes, the old-fashioned way is just hard to top. While monitoring your online banking, maintaining a spreadsheet, and dropping information into a program are great ways to monitor your balances, maintaining a physical checkbook still does the trick as well as any method.

Deborah Fowles, writing for The Balance, notes that knowing how to balance a checkbook by using a register is handy if only because it's a skill you can teach your children. While future generations may be more and more reliant on technology, knowing how to maintain a written register can have the added effect of helping them learn financial responsibility.

If you've never balanced a checkbook or haven't updated a paper checkbook register in some time, the process is fairly straightforward. Author Pierre Lehu, writes for Dummies that a typical register has six columns: check number, date, transaction description, amount, deposit, and balance. You'd likely only need to use the check number column for instances where you wrote a check — for debit card transactions, you could leave the column blank or create your own numbering method.

Filling out this information is also uncomplicated. Fowles recommends maintaining your receipts and recording the information in your checkbook register every week. This will eliminate having to budget large chunks of time for monthly upkeep and give you a more accurate picture of your account balance.

Fowles also suggests synthesizing the convenience of online banking with the tried-and-true physical method. You can use your financial institution's website or mobile app to cross-reference information like transactions and balances, making it easier to find costly mistakes that could lead to bounced checks or overdraft fees.

Balancing a checkbook is a staple of adulthood because it puts you in charge of keeping your money matters in order. Knowing how to balance your book helps you avoid unwanted financial predicaments, and it can help you with good habits like saving and smarter spending.



Social Media Credit Card Scams

How to spot a credit card scam on social media

Social media can be a force of good, connecting people across the globe. It can also be a source of evil, with unscrupulous people and companies trying to get your money, data, and personal information. Social media scams are prevalent in the virtual world; here is a closer look at how they could trick you and how to stay safe.

Hiring opportunities

Searching for a job can be a thankless task, so it makes sense why you'd jump at an inquiry from a potential employer. But, it's important to take a breath and determine if the correspondence is legitimate before you respond. Be very cautious of requests from seemingly respectable companies about your credit card numbers, passwords, or personal data, recommends Robin Ryan, contributor at Forbes.com. You must determine if the message originates with a valid company or employer.



Phishing for information

A simple click on the wrong link, attachment, or ad can unleash terrible consequences. When hackers use a social media phishing scheme, they will promise you a gift, prey on your emotions, or falsely represent themselves as a new or current friend to get you to click on their link, according to Michelle Drolet, writer for Forbes.com.

"The link on the post takes you to a website that requests personal data or causes your computer to get infected with malware, which sends out messages from your profile to your entire contact list," she warns. It can also ask for your credit card information and then use that to make unapproved purchases.

Preying on your heartstrings

Relationships can develop quickly on social media, but not everyone is who they pretend to be. Under the guise of a fake online profile, scammers will try to win your heart. Once they have your trust, they will use it against you to profit financially. After all, if someone you loved was in trouble and needed financial assistance, you'd do anything you could to help, right? Unfortunately, your selflessness may be wasted on a liar.

"Romance scams rank as one of the top social media scams of all time. The FTC reported that in 2018 people lost \$143 million — more than any other consumer fraud type," Drolet reports.

Testing your knowledge

Who doesn't love a quiz that tests your movie knowledge or promises to figure out what fictional character you are by asking about your dessert preferences? Since quizzes on Facebook and Twitter are such a popular online interaction, thieves are using them to their advantage.

"Launching a quiz app may give its creators permission to pull information from your profile, offering hackers an opening to steal your online identity," warns AARP.org. Hackers can then use that information to open new lines of credit in your name, or even hack into your existing credit cards and use them to make large purchases.

Ways to protect yourself online

Although social media scammers can be crafty, you can outsmart them with a few tweaks in your online activity. Be careful with what information you share online and review your privacy settings on all your social media accounts, advises Bridget Small, writer for the Division of Consumer & Business Education for the Federal Trade Commission.

Resist online impulse purchases via an ad or a post. If you're interested in an advertised product, go to the source and vet the company. "Type its name in a search engine with the words like 'scam' or 'complaint,'" adds Small. If you receive a friend request from someone you don't know, say no, advises AARP.org, and avoid using public Wi-Fi when you're using your social media accounts.

Use these tips when you are navigating the complicated world of social media to keep your identity and money secure.

4 Things to Incorporate Into Your Bedtime Routine to Sleep Better

Sleep better with these helpful tips

According to the Center for Disease Control, about one in three adults don't get enough sleep. A lack of sleep has been linked to many chronic conditions and diseases, like depression, heart disease, and Type 2 diabetes. Therefore, it's imperative that you maintain a bedtime routine that can help you fall asleep faster and improve the type of sleep that you're getting. Here's how.

Stick to a bedtime

The most important part of a routine is choosing a bedtime and sticking to it. Select a time that makes the most sense for your lifestyle and don't stray from it unless absolutely necessary. When you start falling asleep at the same time each night, your body creates a sleep-wake cycle and it helps to train your brain to naturally feel tired when it's time for bed. Once you decide on a time that you want to start falling asleep, figure out how much time you need to prepare for sleep. But you'll first need to determine which practices you want to incorporate into your bedtime routine.



Meditate

Throughout the day, we often ignore our bodies in order to stay focused on tasks like work, school, or taking care of pets and children. If you continue to ignore feelings of stress, you could struggle with falling or staying asleep. One method of releasing stressful or anxious feelings is to meditate before bed. Doing so can help you relax mentally and physically, as you are taking the time to be more mindful of what's going on with your body and mind. If you're not a fan of sitting in silence, try using an app like Calm or Headspace.

Listen to music

Another way to calm your mind and body is to listen to music before heading to bed. You'll want to avoid songs with a high BPM (beats per minute) or instruments that are exceptionally loud, like what you'll find in rock music. When contributing to WebMD.com, Michael Breus, Ph.D., stated that "Reputable studies find that music with a rhythm of about 60 beats a minute helps people fall asleep. As you are falling asleep, your heart rate begins to slow, and starts to move toward that 60-beats-per-minute range." You can utilize various websites and apps to find the BPM of certain songs and playlists crafted especially for sleep.

Journal your thoughts

If you often find yourself tossing and turning because you can't stop thinking about the next day or the week ahead, journaling might be a good thing to add to your bedtime routine. Setting aside just 5-10 minutes each night to write down your thoughts and ideas could help your brain focus on falling asleep instead of planning your work day. You can start simple with a quick to-do list and gradually move to adding tasks that need to be completed in the following days. Writing down your thoughts about specific events or conversations that happened can also help you move on from or process them better.

If you're still struggling to sleep after adding some of these things into your bedtime routine, you may need to contact your physician for additional help. They may prescribe you with a sleep aid or suggest a sleep study to better understand what's going on.

