

FIVE MENTAL HABITS FOR CUTTING CONSUMPTION¹

Sami Green[©]

I often hear folks arguing that environmentalism is all about sacrifice—giving up this, banning that. But from eating less meat to requesting smaller portions, often we can cut back on our consumption without giving up our guilty pleasures completely. Heck, it can even be a great way to rediscover and revalue things we have come to take for granted. And because going green often saves money, a recession is a great time to start reevaluating your consumption patterns. Add to that the mass of clutter and stuff that seems to just accumulate, all on its own, over the holidays, and things can get downright messy. In my own efforts to buy less, save more, and reduce the amount I consume, I've found myself developing a few mental habits and strategies for asking myself what I really want, and how badly.

Here are a few to get you started, but I'd love to hear your suggestions.

Mental Habits for Cutting Consumption

- (1) **A Little Less:** Cutting portion sizes in the restaurant, buying a regular instead of a large latte, sticking with a smaller TV. These are all ways we can reduce our material consumption. So each time you make a purchase, ask yourself, do you really need to super size?
- (2) **Maybe Tomorrow:** I often hear financial advice on the radio advising folks to skip that morning cappu-fracu-mocha-wocha-chino. But what if you look forward to it? How about having one every other day, or once a week? If you get takeout pizza every Friday, why not try getting it every other week? It's simple, but effective—and there's no doubt it saves you money. Heck, I've even stopped showering every morning to save water.
- (3) **What's the Alternative?** OK, so you love your burger. But what about trying a veggie burger? Or you can't live without your lunchtime hot dog—what about trying a veggie option? Not only are meat free meals greener, they are often cheaper too. And if you're not ready to make the swap completely, try alternating between the meat and the veggie, the organic and the regular, or whatever it is you are replacing.
- (4) **Avoid Temptation:** Nutritionists often advise weight watchers to never shop when they are hungry, and to always make a shopping list. That way you avoid the impulse purchases, which are often the most unnecessary and unhealthy. I use a similar strategy to cut back on my shopping—if I stick to my list, I'm less tempted to opt for that extra bar of chocolate. I even find that shopping online saves the urge to impulse buy—if I go online when I really need something, I'm less likely to start filling up the cart with other unwanted items. As an added bonus, I save gas, time and I create less demand for yet another huge mega-mall.
- (5) **Put It Off:** Waiting before you buy can be a great way to evaluate what you really need, especially for big purchases. Even if you end up making the purchase a month later, your new fridge, ceiling fan, TV or whatever will be a month younger and will last a month longer. This stuff adds up. You can apply the same principle to grocery shopping too—procrastinating before you go shopping (aka The Grocery Pause) is a great way to force yourself to use up what you have before filling up the fridge.

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