



Don't have a costly Christmas!

Do you know how many shopping days are left till Christmas? Are your grandchildren counting down the sleeps till Santa arrives? Whether you're as excited as they are, or the idea of turkey and tinsel fills you with dread, there's no getting away from the fact that the festive season is fast approaching.

We can't wrap your presents or guarantee perfect roast potatoes, but perhaps we can help with another worry – the cost. Retirement Today spoke to the Financial Ombudsman Service – the free service with the power to sort out complaints between consumers and their bank or insurer – for their top tips to avoid a costly Christmas.

Keep Christmas under wraps with the ombudsman!

1 Make a list:

Make a list of all your Christmas-related expenses. Set yourself a realistic budget for gifts. Knowing your numbers means you can make the most of seasonal offers and cut-price deals – and set aside a 'buffer' for unexpected expenses or last minute gems that catch your eye.

2 Cut costs together:

If you and your friends or family fancy spreading the cost of Christmas between you, why not organise a 'Secret Santa'? Agree a maximum price limit for each gift, pick a name out of the hat, agree a date to meet and share the presents out!

3 Buy now, pay later:

If you're thinking of buying a large gift, you may be planning on using interest-free credit as a way to save money and spread costs. If plan to pay the credit off early, make sure you know when the deal ends. Interest rates can be high if you miss the deadline.

4 Bank holiday budgeting:

Keep an eye on payment dates for bills and regular payments – like direct debits and standing orders – during bank holidays. Bank holidays are not 'working days', so payments might be delayed – or bounced if you don't have cleared funds in your account.

5 Shop around:

Look out for discounts and compare prices between shops or by looking online. If you're buying online, make sure you're happy to hand over your card details. Consider paying using a credit card – as it might offer you more protection if something goes wrong with your purchase. But remember to pay off your card in full, or you could end up paying more.

6 Keep an eye on your cards:

Interest rates can vary considerably on different credit cards and store cards, so check the current rate before you spend. Keep on top of how much you need to pay and when it is due – and if you can't clear the whole balance, think about paying what you can over the minimum payment to reduce your balance more quickly.

7 Presents with a price tag:

While many people are on a tight budget this year, there might still be some high-value presents under the tree. Check your home contents insurance policy. You might find you're not fully covered if these items are stolen or damaged.

8 Accidents happen:

A houseful of people can lead to breakages and spills. Accidental damage policies are often sold as 'add-ons' to contents insurance policies to cover these mishaps. If you're not sure whether you're covered, check with your insurer.

9 Keep things hidden:

When you're out shopping, don't leave your anything on display in your car. Most insurance policies won't cover you if you have something stolen – and you had left it in full view.

10 Keys in the motor:

As temperatures drop, if you have a car and you're warming up your engine, don't leave the keys in the ignition – or leave it unattended. You could find your motor insurance policy wouldn't cover you if your car was stolen.

The majority of people with have a hassle-free holiday season. However, if you do have a financial problem – and you can't sort it out with a bank or insurer – the ombudsman may be able to help ■

Contact: 0300 123 9 123
www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/