

Spring has come and so has the urge to splurge

By Tracy Hanes Special to the Star
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Along with spring's longer days and brighter skies comes the urge to splurge.

Sunshine influences spending behaviour, reducing negative feelings and improving our moods. "The Effect of Weather on Consumer Spending," a study by the School of Business at the University of Alberta and the University of Winnipeg's Faculty of Business and Economics, found that with more sunlight, the more people are willing to spend — and buy.

There are other triggers for spring spending, according to Christine White, of Money Coaches Canada.

"There's definitely a push from retail and there are great sales everywhere," White says. "We have a craving to come out of winter hibernation and we are attracted by something shiny and new."

Some people are emerging from what she calls the "Christmas hangover," when they're more stringent with their money after overspending during the holidays. But come spring, they feel they've been good and deserve to splurge.

Spring is also the season for raises and bonuses. It's also income tax, and income tax refund, time and filers will often spend in anticipation of what they believe their refund will be — sometimes with a false memory of previous refunds, says White.

Here are some of her suggestions to help resist the season's spending temptations, and keep your budget on track:

Outdoor furniture, accessories and plants: Warmer days stimulate people's desires to be out of their homes.

"People crave the vision of entertaining and the experience of enjoying their outdoor space. If you get your stuff out and clean it up, you can still get that

same feeling,” White says. “What happens is that people forget what they already have. They go out and see everything fresh and new in the store. old

Flowers and plants can seem inexpensive but quickly add up. As do garden tools and accessories. “It’s so much easier to just go pick up a new rake or tools, but de-clutter and go through what you own first and you

New clothes:

“We want fresh things in spring — we crave a fresh start,” she says. “Go through the spring and summer clothes you stored away last fall. We often forget that we have shorts and tank tops we bought last year.”

Thrift shops are a great way to add new-to-you pieces, without breaking the bank too.

Home decor: Take inventory of what you have. Can you use it in a different way or move to a new location? Get set to purge and organize.

“De-cluttering and cleaning your house will often give the same satisfaction as buying something new for it,” says White.

Gym memberships: As temperatures climb, and we shed heavy coats and sweaters, people impulsively join gyms to get in shape for swimsuits and shorts. Instead, White offers, buy a fitness tracking device — like a FitBit — and get outside to walk, hike or ride your bike. Make use of the public tennis and basketball courts, or another activity that costs next to nothing.

Spring events: The season is chock-full of special occasions, from Easter to Mother’s Day, Victoria Day long weekend, graduations and proms. All of those events can take a financial toll.

“Everyone knows Christmas is coming, but we are not mindfully aware that a lot of things happen in spring and summer,” says White. “People underestimate what they’ll have to spend on graduations, weddings and proms. Easter has become a big thing and kids expect gifts.”

The difference, she adds, is being mindful about what’s coming up and planning ahead; for instance, budgeting for a daughter’s graduation dress or a Mother’s Day gift.

“If you leave things to the last minute, you’ll spend more,” White says. “If you plan ahead and be proactive, you will be less likely to spend impulsively and less likely be victim to retail messages.”

Shopping as a mood lifter: Retail therapy is a thing, says White, as it releases dopamine — the brain chemical that makes us feel good.

With so many spring sales, you may think you’re saving money, “but you are not getting the advantage of a sale unless it’s something you needed or were going to buy anyway,” she says.

“There are so many pretty things in store windows,” White says. “It’s nice in springtime and patios are open. It’s fun to go out for lunch or dinner, then poke around stores. But if you are going into stores, you will spend money.”

Instead, she suggests a walk through a park, a ravine or a new neighbourhood. Instead of dinner out, consider dinner at your home or your friends’ place.

The income tax refund itch: White says it’s good to treat yourself with some of your income tax refund — just not all of it. Instead, consider dividing its uses: Put a quarter of the funds towards debt, invest a quarter, save a quarter for an emergency fund, and use the last quarter to buy something for yourself. Or do the same by dividing it into thirds.