

Advantage

Your personal finance edge

March–April 2020



The best way to use your tax refund? **SAVE!**

**Skimping on sleep?
Tips to help you
survive...**

**Grow herbs—
the easy way!**

Breaks on a budget

**Spring cleaning—
naturally!**

**Quiz: Are you an
Easter Einstein?**

Spring forward to reach your goals

Spring is here and with it comes a time of renewal and fresh starts. In reality, March and April mean the frenzy of tax season and often longer days—requiring us to function on less rest than we might like. We can certainly relate, and that’s why we’ve spent extra time to make this issue a real eye-opener.

Check out our article on how to keep energy high...even when you aren’t getting your full eight hours of sleep (although we advise catching up on your sleep sooner rather than later). Also, read up on our picks for a spring getaway to help you rejuvenate from a long winter.

If you are lucky enough to be receiving a tax refund, that should perk you up a bit. But, before you start spending, be sure to refer to our tips for using it wisely. You may also want to take a few of those refund dollars and plant an herb garden (check out our tips in this issue) or simply add to your retirement savings.

Don’t miss our other fantastic articles in this issue as well, including tips to spring clean using natural cleansers and fun Easter trivia.

Here’s to a happy spring!

Sincerely,
Your trusted advisors



In this **issue**

March–April 2020

Features

4 • **The best way to use your tax refund? SAVE!**

If you are getting money back from your taxes this year, check out the best ways to stash it for the future.

6 • **Skimping on sleep? Tips to help you survive...**

Try these strategies when you simply can't get enough shut-eye.

8 • **Spring cleaning—naturally!**

Up your spring cleaning game by using these natural cleaning alternatives.

10 • **Grow herbs—the easy way!**

Use these tips to get your herb garden started.

Departments

2 • **From the firm** | **Spring forward to reach your goals...**

Spring is here and with it comes a time of renewal and fresh starts.

12 • **Life and living** | **Breaks on a budget...**

There are plenty of places in North America that offer a spring break vibe without breaking the bank. Try these suggestions from budgettravel.com.

14 • **Mind flex** | **Quiz: Are you an Easter Einstein?**

Roll out these questions during your Easter festivities and see who's the genius in your group!





**The best way
to use your tax
refund? SAVE!**

If you are receiving a tax refund this year, it can be tempting to buy items that are a bit more exciting than simply padding your savings account. However, as your rational brain will tell you, using your refund in one of the following ways can make a big difference in reaching your long-term goals:

Pay off debt.

The smartest use of a tax refund is to eliminate (or at least reduce) high-interest debt such as credit cards and other loans. You'll not only feel less burdened by the debt, but you'll be saving money in the long run by paying less interest.

Top up your emergency fund.

A tax refund is nothing more than a return of the tax money you set aside all year. So, don't treat it like a windfall, but rather as your own hard-earned dollars. If you don't have an emergency fund already, it's the perfect time to create one and use your refund to start it. Such a fund will come in handy when any financial surprises hit, such as healthcare bills, car repairs or broken appliances.

Rev up your retirement savings.

Your future self will be forever grateful if you forgo short-term gratification for long-term savings in a qualified retirement account. You can also reduce your taxable income when you do (be sure to check with our firm for contribution limits). Even if your refund is just a few hundred dollars, the power of compound interest will help you grow your money without any additional effort.

Maximize contributions to education accounts or put it toward other long-term goals.

Consider adding your tax refund to any education accounts you have set up for your children or grandchildren. Each state has its own rules for education savings accounts, so be sure to check those out before determining how you want to proceed. Also, consider your long-term goals. For example, you could tuck your refund away for a down payment on a new car or house. You may even want to use it to fund a new business or expand an existing one.

Whatever choices you make about your tax refund, take the needed time to plan. Our firm can help you review your financial situation and your tax obligations to make sure you are making the most of your refund and minimizing any tax burden. ■



Skimping on sleep?

Tips to help
you survive...



A lot of people skimp on sleep. Sometimes it just can't be helped. Nonetheless, long-term sleep deprivation can have a significantly negative impact on your health, so for those times when you fall short on much needed shuteye, use these tips to help you survive.

1 Learn to power nap.

A quick 20- to 30-minute nap can boost your energy and help you power through an additional few hours if needed. This kind of sleep can leave you feeling more refreshed than trying to “catch up” by sleeping for longer periods of time on a sporadic schedule.

2 Delegate.

Do you wish you could sleep more but never seem to have the time to do so? It may be time to simply offload some of your “must-do’s.” Lean on coworkers, friends and family members when you need to delegate tasks, instead of skimping on sleep and trying to do it all yourself.

3 Delay decision making when you are sleep deprived.

We all get tired sometimes, but if you are routinely not getting enough sleep, it can be both mentally and physically draining. During these periods, it's best to delay big decisions until your brain is better rested.

4 Practice healthful habits.

If you do have to skimp on sleep, make sure you remain healthy in other areas, such as diet and

water intake. Even a little exercise can help you feel more energized when you are sleep deprived. What you want to avoid is trying to fuel your body with sugar and caffeine—which will only make you feel more tired eventually.

5 Prioritize your responsibilities.

You can't work 24 hours a day, so when you reach the point of exhaustion, it's time to prioritize. Focus on things that absolutely need to get done, and leave the rest until the next day or later.

6 Know your sleep minimum.

While pulling an all-nighter every now and then may be unavoidable, doing so regularly is a recipe for disaster. Make a minimum amount of sleep non-negotiable. Most people need at least six hours of sleep a night. Find your happy minimum and vow not to dip below it unless absolutely necessary.

There are times when we all have to run on less sleep than is optimal for our well-being. Use these tips to help you through these times. If you are routinely sleep deprived, it's important to consider lifestyle changes that allow you to get the sleep you need—and deserve! ■

Spring cleaning— naturally



Giving your home (or office) a good spring cleaning is practically a rite of passage once warmer weather arrives. This year, up your spring cleaning game by using these natural cleaning alternatives. Doing so can improve your indoor air quality and keep your pets and children safer!

Even better, some of these natural cleaning products may be staples in your pantry. Wellnessmama.com offers a list of natural cleaning supplies—many of which you may already have at home...

- white vinegar • natural salt • baking soda
- borax • washing soda • hydrogen peroxide
- lemons • microfiber cloths
- essential oils (optional)
- a spray bottle or two (preferably glass)

Now, try these easy and inexpensive “recipes” to get your chemical-free spring cleaning started:

Glass cleaner: Mix equal parts of vinegar and water in a glass spray bottle to cut through dirt, leaving glass streak-free.

Tile grout cleaner: Mix one part water and three parts baking soda into a paste. Apply to grout and let sit for a few minutes. Scrub with a toothbrush and then remove and rinse with a sponge.

Cookware cleansers: Use sea salt or coarse salt mixed with a little lemon juice and scrub with a cloth. You can also mix baking soda and water into a paste. This mixture also works well on stained tea cups, coffee mugs and cutting boards.

Fabric softener: Mix one part vinegar and two parts water together. Add 1/4 to 1/3 cup to the final rinse cycle.

Toilet cleaner: Use undiluted white vinegar, pour around the top of the toilet bowl and scrub until clean.

Baking soda oven cleaner: A paste of baking soda and water cleans ovens without the chemicals or the hassle of the self-cleaning cycle. Make a paste on the bottom of the oven, leave for a few hours, and then wipe clean with a sponge for a chemical-free shiny and clean oven.

Scouring powder: Remove soap scum on tubs and showers by making your own scouring powder with two parts baking soda, one part salt and one part borax. This mixture will cut through even the toughest scum!

Dishwasher booster: Fill a dishwasher safe bowl or jar with two cups of vinegar and set it on the top rack of the dishwasher. Run through on a hot cycle with no other dishes in the dishwasher to clean and remove musty odor.

Natural air freshener: In a medium saucepan, simmer a quart of water with natural ingredients (see ideas below) to freshen and clean the air. Make sure not to let the water evaporate completely:

- 1 sliced lemon, 2 tablespoons rosemary and a dash of vanilla
- 1 sliced lime and 1 piece chopped ginger root
- 1 sliced orange, 1 sliced lime, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, a dash of nutmeg and cloves, and 2 tablespoons thyme



These basic recipes should help you bring extra spring sparkle safely to your home. Don't forget to use reusable cloths instead of paper towels or other disposables. Now you are ready to spring clean—naturally! ■



Grow herbs— the easy way!

If you love jazzing up your meals with lots of different herbs, but don't always have the time (or budget) to keep them in stock...grow your own! Review our list of the best herbs to get your garden started:

Basil

Easy to grow and appealing to many, this herb will sprout quickly and be ready for picking within a few weeks. Clip the fresh leaves to enjoy in salad or on pizza.

Oregano

This is another easy-to-grow herb that will add spice to your favorite Italian-inspired dishes. Once the stems are about 4 inches tall, you can start harvesting.

Parsley

Simple to start from a seed or a seedling, parsley is also packed with vitamin C. Both the curly- and flat-leaf varieties boast more vitamin C than an orange per weight.

Thyme

This herb is best planted in full sun and picked before the plant flowers.



Cilantro

One of the earliest herbs cultivated for culinary use, cilantro regenerates itself easily. Simply pinch the flowers off the plants to preserve the flavor.

Mint

Make sure to separate this fast-growing herb from others to avoid it taking over your whole garden.

Starting with these six herbs offers a well-rounded selection for cooking. As you begin, be sure to use a soil mix specific for indoor growing, and don't overwater your herbs. The little bit of effort required up front to grow your own herbs will pay big flavor dividends later! ■

Breaks on a budget

After the long stretch between the winter holidays and spring break, it's common to want to go somewhere warmer or simply get away for a little R&R. Luckily, there are several destinations in North America that offer a great getaway destination without breaking your budget. Consider a few from budgettravel.com:

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

With miles of sand, charter fishing expeditions and world-class eateries, Myrtle Beach offers an irresistible southern-style welcome. The Myrtle Beach Oceanfront Boardwalk and Promenade features the Family Kingdom amusement park, which includes some massive roller coasters—a nice distraction from all that relaxing on the beach!

Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Tennessee

Named America's most popular national park, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park features a major theme park and miles of trails and streams. Head to the park for fishing, hiking and scenic drives like the six-mile Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail. You can also visit Dolly Parton's amusement venue, Dollywood, for authentic Tennessee music, food and a few thrill rides. Local motels offer restaurants, indoor pools and mountain views.

New Orleans, Louisiana

The French Quarter features cobblestone streets, hot jazz and unforgettable cuisine, and that's just the beginning of New Orleans' charm. Trendy nightclubs, ivy-covered townhouses and Creole cottages add to the appeal. You also don't want to miss the annual French Quarter Festival in April, sampling a few beignets at Café Du Monde and exploring the city's unique music scene.

Washington, D.C.

Interested in tours of noteworthy national treasures (at a lower cost)? You'll find them in Washington, D.C. From tours of the Capitol building and exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution to the National Archives and the Library of Congress, D.C. offers its fair share of freebies. You can also enjoy a visit

to the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial and the new Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. There are also many amazing restaurants that cater to travelers.

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

If your budget doesn't have room for a trip to Europe, then this moderately priced Canadian city might be just the ticket. You can experience European-inspired architecture and food everywhere. While there, visit the Montreal Biodôme, which re-creates four ecosystems, including more than 200 species of animals. There is also the landmark Notre-Dame Basilica, the Vieux-Port de Montreal park and the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montreal. If you visit in late March or even early April, you may be able to take a side trip to see (and taste!) real Canadian maple syrup being made.

Cape Ann, Massachusetts

An authentic New England city without the hustle and bustle of bigger cities, Gloucester, Massachusetts is a tight-knit fishing community on Cape Ann—just 45 minutes north of Boston. Gloucester's Good Harbor Beach has a wide stretch of fine white sand with dunes that lead the way to Rocky Neck artists' colony. Here, you can soak up the sumptuous light that has attracted many notable artists—including Milton Avery, Edward Hopper and Winslow Homer. Of course, you'll also be able to enjoy a lot of fresh fish and other delicious local eats.

These lower cost spring getaways are great places to take family or to go with a group of friends. Be sure to inquire about package deals on travel booking websites or when you book accommodations directly. Chances are, you'll have a fabulous time while staying on budget! ■

Are you an Easter Einstein?

Take our
quiz to
find out!



'Tis the season for Easter eggs and spring traditions. Add to your Easter festivities by rolling out these questions, and see who the Easter Einstein is in your group!

- 1 Which country has the tradition of eating hot cross buns at Easter?
- 2 Who held the first egg roll on the White House lawn and in what year?
- 3 What are two traditional Easter games?
- 4 The custom of giving candy and chocolate for Easter first appeared during what historic age?
- 5 The Easter sunrise service, a distinctive Protestant observance in North America, comes from what Biblical event?
- 6 In the United States, what is the traditional Easter meat people eat?
- 7 What two main colors are associated with Easter?
- 8 How much did the world's most expensive egg sell for and who made it?
- 9 Where is the largest egg museum located and how many eggs are on display?
- 10 When was the Cadbury candy company started?

Answers:

1. Great Britain 2. Lucy Hayes, wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1878. 3. The Easter egg hunt and egg rolling. 4. The Victorian age. 5. It is a reenactment of Mary Magdalene's visit to Jesus' tomb on the morning of his Resurrection. 6. Ham 7. Purple and yellow 8. 9.5 million U.S. dollars. It was the winter egg designed by Faberge. 9. Poland; the Easter Egg Museum has more than 1500 eggs from all over the world. 10. In Birmingham, England in 1824 by John Cadbury (it sold tea, coffee and drinking chocolate).



LEIF E. PETERSON, CPA

**NOW
IS THE
TIME**



The tax deadline is approaching fast—have you filed yet? Take advantage of our convenient, paperless process.

But hurry—time is short!