

# Tamper-Proof Your Good Money Habits With These Hacks



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Maybe you've committed to saving a few hundred dollars every month or to devoting a certain percentage of your income to paying down debt because you know that, in the long run, your hard work and sacrifices will pay off.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to get distracted by an emotional day or particularly tempting impulse buy—and suddenly you're completely off track.

“So many of our buying behaviors happen automatically, without much conscious thought,” says financial psychologist [Brad Klontz, Psy.D.](#) “The key to reining in our spending is to put systems in place to increase the time-gap between our impulse to buy and pulling the trigger.”

Translation: If you really want to stay true to your financial aspirations, it pays to have some pre-existing self-control checks—like the following 10 tactics—in place.

## 1. Disconnect your checking account and emergency fund.

If you're the type who might be tempted to access your emergency fund for, say, a bachelor party, do yourself a favor and move your savings to a credit union or other institution that's separate from the bank where you regularly do business.

“If you transfer money to this account on an automated basis, it will be out-of-sight, out-of-mind,” says [Lisa M. LaMarche](#), a Certified Financial Planner and Certified Public Accountant in Delaware. “Also, it usually takes a few days to transfer money back to your checking account, so you will be less likely to use it [impulsively].”

## 2. Time-delay your purchases.

Whenever you feel the urge to spend, Klontz recommends taking a pause to engage your “thinking brain” by asking yourself the following questions: Is this something I really

need? Can I afford this? Where will I put it? How am I likely to feel about this purchase tomorrow morning?

Especially for bigger buys, he suggests committing to a 24 to 48 hour wait-period between your impulse and your actual purchase. “Quite often, whatever emotion was attached to the impulse has faded by then, and it is easier to more objectively think through the pros and cons,” he explains.

This tactic can also apply to investing, LaMarche says: “It’s easy to get swept up by the news of a particular company, which might lead you to purchase a stock that you may not have really researched with financial tools.” She adds that since most investors should be making decisions for the long term, waiting 24 hours won’t make a material difference.

### **3. Use online tools to curb shopping.**

Browser plugins like [StayFocusd](#) and [LeechBlock](#) allow you to set limits on when you can visit certain websites—which can really save your budget if you have a tendency to shop online during specific timeframes, like late at night or while you eat lunch.

“Shopping online can become a pastime activity,” LaMarche says. “And the inconvenience of returning an item [you regret buying] might lead you to just keep it. Any way to limit this behavior is imperative.”

Know, though, that using online tools alone may not be enough to build self-control. “When willpower is low, it is easy to change an app or browser setting to override the controls,” says Certified Financial Planner R. Joseph Ritter, Jr. of [Zacchaeus Financial Counseling Inc.](#) “So be deliberate in shutting off your computer, tablet or phone after a certain time and engaging in another activity.”

## 4. Unsubscribe from store emails and mailings.

Many of us wake up to a litany of emails from our favorite retail outlets proclaiming new arrivals, markdowns and flash sales, which can really pull our purse strings. (Our physical mailboxes can get clogged with enticing catalogues, too.)

If you need help abstaining, the solution is simple: Opt out. “Once you go to the site and see something you like, it can be difficult to hit the pause button and step back to think before you buy,” LaMarche says. “So before even opening the link, scroll to the bottom of the email, unsubscribe and reduce the temptation.”

## 5. Unstore your credit cards from online shopping sites.

“When sticking to a budget and making a lifestyle change, convenience may actually be a hindrance,” says Certified Financial Planner Joe O’Boyle, founder of [O’Boyle Wealth Management](#).

While easy online shopping tools—like [Amazon 1-Click](#) and paying via Paypal—save you time checking out, you’re far more likely to spend money when your credit card information is stored. Retailers know this, of course—it’s why they offer these tools in the first place.

Removing your credit card information from Amazon, Seamless and your other favorite retail sites means you’ll have to do more work to complete every purchase. Chances are, as you get up from the computer to grab your wallet, you’ll start rethinking whether you really need what’s in your virtual shopping cart.

## 6. Sample an all-cash diet.

Whether you commit to [all-cash spending](#) for one day a week, a whole month or indefinitely, locking up your credit cards and using paper is a proven way to curb spending.

“By forcing yourself to use cash, you are only able to spend what you are carrying on you,” O’Boyle says. “When handing over cash for a purchase, you are far more likely to *feel* your hard-earned money being spent, rather than impulsively swiping a credit card.”

He advises padding your wallet with no more than what you’re comfortable spending in a given day.

## **7. Enlist help from an accountability partner.**

Whether you hire a financial planner or ask a partner, friend or family member to help you out, having someone in your life to remind you of your goals is an excellent way to stay on track. That's because the fear of disappointing someone else can be much more motivating than the idea of disappointing yourself.

Klontz says those who are in committed relationships and have combined finances can further increase their accountability by coming up with a joint spending limit. "You might agree, for example, that any spontaneous purchase above \$50 requires that you call the other for prior approval," he says. "Often, as you start to make the call, you realize the purchase isn't worth the effort."

## 8. Pre-commit to investing.

If planning for the future is your No. 1 goal, dedicate funds toward investing via [automation](#) by setting up 401(k) contributions to deduct from your paycheck or consistent transfers from your checking to an Individual Retirement Account.

“This is a very easy way to ensure money is being put aside before you even see it,” LaMarche says. “Set it and then forget about it, until you get your annual raise. Then consider increasing that amount you’ve designated.”

If you’re an investing newbie, you can also take advantage of tools like (ahem) [Acorns](#) that seamlessly round up and invest your spare change, and allow you to make one-time and recurring investments into a diversified portfolio. (There are also apps like [Digit](#) that automatically transfer amounts to your savings account.)

## 9. Count your daily transactions.

O’Boyle suggests this client-tested tip, especially if you are trying to stick to a new budget: Keep tabs on how many spending transactions you make.

“At the end of each day, simply count up the total number of transactions and track them on your phone, a spreadsheet, your refrigerator or whatever works for you,” he says. “Some people are surprised to find that they swipe their cards over five times a day.”

This type of tracking creates awareness and can help you change your behavior over time. You may even consider creating a daily transaction limit to help you break poor spending habits.

## 10. Reward yourself every six months.

Maintaining good financial habits is hard work, and giving yourself incentives to keep going ensures that you’ll continue to uphold these habits for years to come. That’s why Ritter advises his clients to buy something they’ve been putting off—like a new gadget or a weekend vacation—every six months by saving for it each month between now and then.

“When the time comes, you get to enjoy your money, and you can indulge yourself without the guilt,” he says. “This is a good way to develop self-control and not cut out fun spending entirely.”