

Your worst money habit might not be that bad

YAHOO!
FINANCE

By [Lisa Scherzer](#)



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Everyone has bad habits. Maybe you interrupt people when they talk, let your dirty gym clothes pile up on the floor, or misuse the word “literally.”

We [asked](#) readers to tell us what their worst money habits are, the one they wish they could kick but just can't seem to follow through on. More than 300 of you fessed up to things like paying off credit card bills late, carrying a credit card balance month to month, buying clothes you don't need, not being able to quit smoking despite rising cigarette costs, and a lot of spending too much on food.

A robust industry of [websites](#), apps, and services exists to help people keep to their [budgets](#). And we're all familiar with the time-worn advice dispensed to big food spenders: keep a list and stick to it, don't go food shopping when you're hungry, look for coupons, buy food that's in season, etc.

So if we know what we're overspending on and we know how to stop doing that, what's the problem? Is it simply a lack willpower?

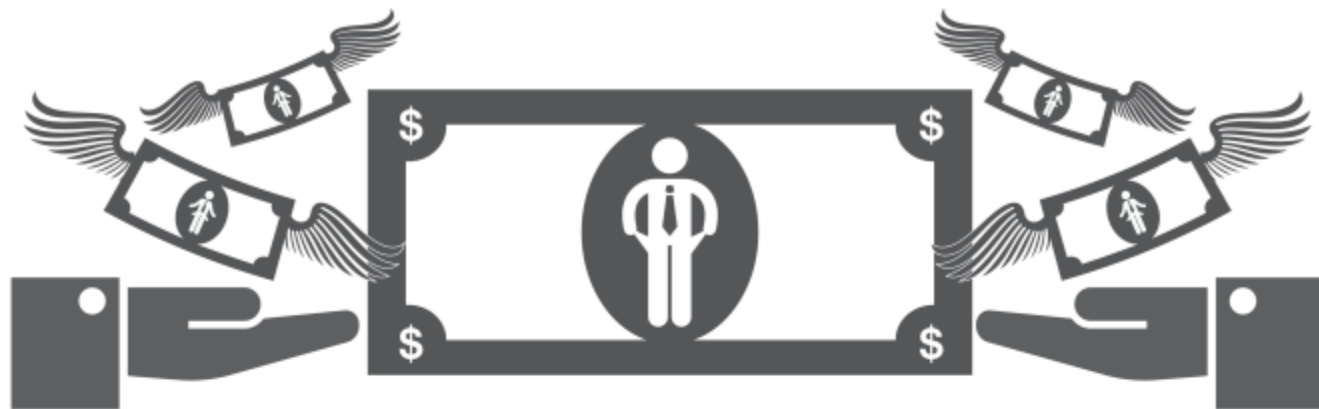
People tend to overestimate how much willpower they have, says George Loewenstein, professor of economics and psychology at Carnegie Mellon University. One reason we do that is because we credit ourselves for exerting discipline and willpower in situations in which we aren't truly tempted.

Instead, Loewenstein says, the best way to save money isn't by beating yourself up over the smaller stuff, like the eating out. Instead focus on the one-time decisions that could save you more over the long term. For example, he says, many consumers would be better off switching to a higher-deductible auto or homeowners

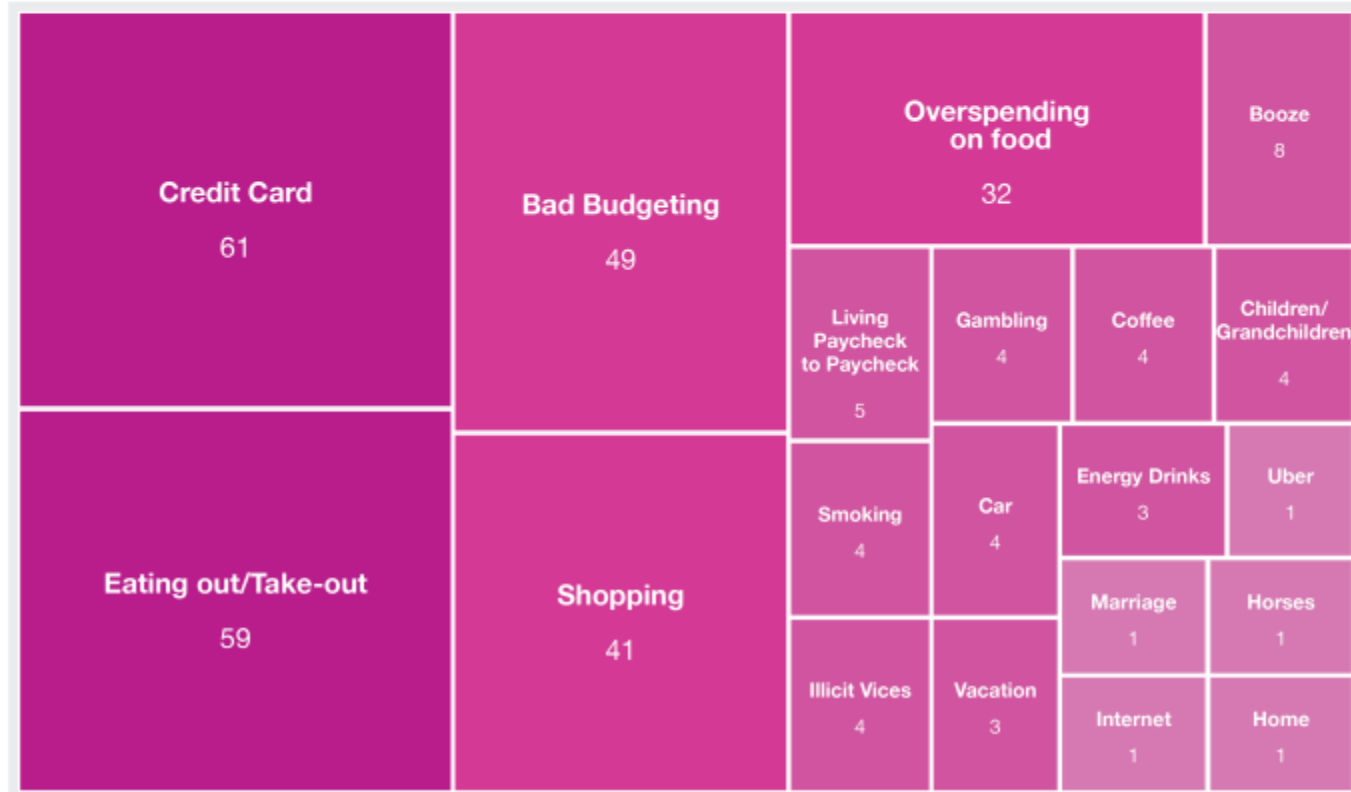
insurance policy (because they end up paying too much for low-deductible policies), not buying a cellphone plan that lets you upgrade to a new phone every two years (phones last much longer than that and you end up overpaying for the new phone), and keeping a credit card only for serious emergencies — otherwise a debit card is safer (just be sure you don't have [overdraft protection](#), which can add up to big fees).

“Cutting down on food, one of life’s few reliable pleasures, isn’t necessarily a good way to restrict spending,” Loewenstein says.

Beyond your food budget, tackling credit card debt and avoiding late fees are “good targets for behavior change, since you’re basically paying for nothing,” he says.



What Are Your Worst Money Habits?



Here's a sampling of our readers' confessions, in answering the question:

What's the one bad money habit you just can't seem to kick?:

Eating out too often, also splurging on clothing purchases.

Thomas, 30, Boston

Spending too much money on eating out instead of cooking at home.

Elena, age 19, Portland, Ore.

Spending too much on food.

Steven, 23, Queens, NY

Continuing to charge stuff on my credit card. I am trying to pay it off but it is hard to stay in my budget so I end up charging more than I want.

Kelly, 42, Castle Rock, Colo.

Getting take-out for dinner when we're both too tired to cook.

Anna, 31, Oregon

I can't quit smoking — despite the rising cost of cigarettes.

Christy MacTaggart, 41, Jewett City, Conn.

Spending too much money on food for sure. Plus going to department stores to browse around when I really don't need anything.

Christie, 28, Syracuse, NY

I have a balance on all three of my credit cards, spend too much on eating out, and always seem to buy something I don't need then regretting it later when I really need the money.

Manny, 23, Mesa, Ariz.

Paying late and always being angry at myself for it, even when I have the money to pay.

Barbara, 66, Fresno, Calif.

I spend way too much eating out for lunch... I've been reading about Soylent and DIY equivalents and will be drinking those over lunch rather than eating out.

Kyle, 21, Lincoln, Neb.

Having a hard time sticking to my grocery budget. We are vegan and eat organic only.

Laura, 50, Taos NM

I have horses. Horses are a very expensive habit. Enough said!

Elizabeth, 55, Los Angeles

I spend too much buying groceries I intend on eating; but then opportunity or impulse arises and I end up eating out. This piles up as restaurants are more expensive, and groceries which are perishable are wasted.

Michael, 27, Charlottesville, Va.

Shoes and clothes! I know I have only so much for lunches, gas, household bills, but will cut myself short if I see a great sale! Damn those sales! I might be broke, but I look good!

Cynthia, 48, Chesapeake, Va.

I have \$10,000 worth of credit card debt, and I continuously use them to buy more items like food. I only make \$9,000 a year and want to get out of debt and stop spending.

Tiffany, 22, Los Angeles

I can't stop buying Red Bull. If I have 10 dollars to my name for the week, I'll buy 2 Red Bulls and have nothing for the rest of the week.

John, 33, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

I carry way too high of a balance on way too many credit cards. I started out with a couple hundred on one card, and it just grew from there. The bad part? I had the cash to pay for everything at the time! I just liked the idea of not having to pay for it! Boy do I regret that now that I am trying to get out of debt!!

Rebecca, 25, Greenville, SC

Too much on food during work hours everyday.

Lori L, 44, Norfolk, Va.

Not quitting smoking yet. My county is adding \$2 per pack "sin tax" this year.

Anne, 31, Juneau, AK

I am now a widower; when my wife was alive her last months I'd get DAILY whatever take-out she wanted. I have continued this on weekends now with my daughter and grandchildren.

AB, 60, Chicago

Spending too much on eating out and not keeping a close eye on my credit card balance.

Jose, 22, Chicago

Spending too much on dinners at restaurants and food in stores.

Victoria C, 61, Bellefontaine, Ohio

Too many \$10 lunches per week, 3 or 4.

Larry, 51, Houston

*My impulse online purchases. I have recently started to combat this by unsubscribing to all of my daily shopping emails. This has helped remove the daily temptation to buy something just because it is on "sale."
LIES!*

Tiffany, 31, Chaska, Minn.