



Extension News Column

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Re: Pinching Pennies

Personal care products keep us smelling good, looking good and even feeling good. The average U.S. consumer spent \$616 on personal care in 2008, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a 54 percent increase from 1998 and a 113 percent surge from 1984, when the bureau first started tracking such data. However, even in buying these items, you can save a few pennies.

Buying a bar of soap may not seem like much, but you can make it last longer. When you buy your favorite soap, open both ends of the paper wrapper on each bar. Let the soap dry out for 30 days. This harder soap bar will wash just as well, but will last 50 percent longer. While it is drying, put it in the closet, dresser drawer or linen closet and it acts as a sachet to make the fabrics smell better.

What do you do with those little slivers of soap bar when they are too small to use? Save the slivers in a plastic bag until you have a bag full. Put them in a double boiler and slowly melt them. You may need to add a little water to begin the melting process. Pour the mixture into a nonstick baking dish and let it set. Cut into bars and you are ready to go again. Melting glycerin type soap is a snap, but opaque types are a little trickier. In the case of regular bath bars, I melt them enough to stick them together, form a patty or ball, place on waxed paper and let them cool.

I've also taken those slivers and thrown them in a jar. When the jar is full, put in a little water and let it do its magic. After a few days, you'll end up with a soap jell that can be used with a net scrubber.

Shampoo is another important part of our daily regime. Regardless of what shampoo you use, the way you use it is most important. If you read the instructions on the side of the container, it says to shampoo, rinse and repeat. There is a great deal of debate about whether the second wash is necessary. If you are washing your hair each day or if your hair is short and easy to clean, you may be using more shampoo than necessary. Your hair gets clean in the first wash, the second one is an extra. Too much shampoo can strip natural oils, leaving your hair less shiny. You can tell if your hair needs the second wash by the way it feels. You may be able to skip the second wash, which will save shampoo and time.

Your hair can't tell how much your shampoo costs — expensive hair care products are sometimes no more effective than inexpensive ones. In fact, many expensive products are actually produced by the same companies that make the inexpensive ones and contain virtually the same ingredients. You might be pleasantly surprised with the results of a 99-cent shampoo if you're willing to give it a shot.

Razor blades are very expensive. This hint comes from my oldest son. He told me that you could sharpen the blades in disposable razors by rubbing them on the leg of your blue jeans. In thinking about this, it makes sense. As you cut with a knife, the thin edge curls back and doesn't cut as well over time. You straighten the edge with a sharpening steel and it cuts again. Rubbing the razor on the denim will straighten out the edge, providing a better shave. Plus, it doesn't hurt to get rid of all that soap and whisker residue that gets packed around the blades. He says he has used the same disposable razor for more than a month now. Check YouTube.com for specific information and try it to see if it works for you.

Personal care takes a bite out of our budget. Choose carefully and experiment with what you use to get the most from your dollars.

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