

Psych Yourself Up to

Do a personal check-in

Unmet emotional needs can trigger a desire to self-soothe in the form of a little retail therapy, says April Lane Benson, PhD, author of *To Buy or Not to Buy*. If you're feeling angry, lonely or tired, you'll be prone to poor decision-making. Don't wait until you're staring down a pair of boots you don't need. Before shopping, check in with yourself: Are you worn out? Did you have a lousy day? Are you still seething from an argument? If your emotions are running high, put off the trip to the mall.



Be aware of sensory seduction

Things like soft music and appealing scents have long been known to relax customers into spending more. Researchers at the University of Minnesota have shown that standing on a comfy carpet can make you more open to buying than standing on tile. Simply knowing your senses are being manipulated helps combat the effects. The next time you're debating a purchase, step away (or even better, step outside) and try to imagine that item in your own home—without the soundtrack or fragrances. Then ask yourself: Does that pink sequined beret still hold the same appeal?

Declutter your desk

Before you shop online, it's a good idea to tidy up, suggests a study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. The 150 study participants were separated into three environments—one group sat facing shelves strewn with office supplies, another sat facing organized shelves and the third sat facing empty shelves—and then asked how much they would spend on items like a microwave, a desk lamp or dinner out. People in the disorganized environment were willing to pony up more than either of the two other groups. Researchers think it's because clutter can make you feel out of control, which can lead to impulse shopping.



Cut the chitchat

The more time and energy a salesperson spends on you, the more obligated you'll feel to make a purchase, says Emily Guy Birken, author of *Choose Your Retirement*. Squash your guilt over "wasting" a friendly salesperson's time (talking with customers is what they're paid to do) or keep your conversation short.

Save

The urge to impulse-shop is all in your head. These science-based secrets will help keep you from accidentally splurging. BY KATE ROCKWOOD

Calculate the cost in hours

The next time you're looking at a \$60 price tag, convert the dollars into how many hours you'd have to work to earn that item, suggests Kit Yarrow, PhD, a consumer psychology professor at Golden State University. Those shoes? They cost three hours of your life! Buy them only if they're worth it.



Avoid the mall after yoga

When you're feeling Zen—say, after a massage or a vacation—you're more likely to fantasize about the future and crave the gear that will complete the fantasy. (Oh, look, a gorgeous 20-piece copper cook set—someday you'll have tons more time to cook!) Shoppers browsing when they're very relaxed are willing to spend 11% more on items, according to a study published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. Go in with a plan, says Benson, so you'll pay attention to what you need now.



Silence your phone

Text messages and email alerts don't merely make it difficult to focus. When you're comparison shopping, those little interruptions can also push you to choose an item hastily, which may up your likelihood of buyer's remorse, according to a 2014 study published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. So next time you hit the stores, hit the silence button on your phone, too.

Drink up

You may know not to grocery-shop on an empty stomach. But hunger and thirst may make you spend more on nonfood items, too, says Yarrow, author of *Decoding the New Consumer Mind*. That's because humans aren't great at distinguishing psychological desires (*that pretty sweater will cheer me up*) from physiological needs, like water. Shop while you're dehydrated or peckish and you're more likely to buy the expensive cashmere when a drink or a snack would have lessened the craving.



WEIRDEST SAVINGS RESEARCH EVER!

Who knew? Scientists at a university in the Netherlands asked people to drink five cups of water, then browse for 45 minutes. The same self-control participants used to delay going to the bathroom also helped them spend less.