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This article was written as “link bait” for Coupon Cactus for the holiday shopping season.

Does Your ‘Shopping Behavior’ Add to Holiday Stress?

For many people, the holidays are anything but jolly. Over-long to-do lists crowded with social obligations, family demands and the hunt for the “perfect” gift fuel holiday stress, making December anything but merry and bright.

“People feel tremendous pressure to get gifts for everybody and not only to get gifts for everybody, to get the *right* gift for everyone. The malls are extremely crowded and they become almost over-stimulating with all of the people, all of the sales, all of the decorations, all of the holiday music. It’s hard to stay focused and purchase what you need and not feel distracted by all the other demands,” explained Emory School of Medicine psychologist Nadine Kaslow in an online *CNN Medical* article.

Rushing around crowded malls can push people into a kind of “holiday hysteria” that psychologists say is driven by the individual’s personal approach to self-control or impulse control, the two behaviors that most affect shopping stress. Understanding what triggers holiday anxiety can help people anticipate potential problems and act to avoid or control them. In an article on the Washington University in St. Louis website, psychology professor Edwin Fisher provided tips on avoiding the three most common shopping behaviors that generate holiday shopping stress:

Overspending. To stay within your holiday shopping budget, put away your credit cards and use cash or a debit card to make holiday purchases. Overspenders should consider using a prepaid credit or debit account that limits spending to deposited funds. When the balance reaches zero, you’re done shopping.

Decision-making. To focus shopping efforts, decide on gifts and make a list before you shop. If you travel from store to store hunting for a better gift or better price, set a shopping time limit. When time runs out, stop shopping and buy. Keep yourself on track by setting the alarm on your cell phone to signal when time is up. Avoiding the mall and shopping at smaller stores will also limit your choices, making it easier to come to a decision.

Procrastination. Procrastinators tend to think they have plenty of time to do their holiday shopping until that time suddenly evaporates and the holiday is upon them. Combat the urge to put off shopping by turning it into a social occasion and arranging to shop with a friend. The chronically late may also find it helpful to prepare their gift-giving list early and carry it with them so they can purchase gift items as they see them.

Online shopping tops many stress-reducing tip lists, offering holiday shoppers multiple advantages:

- **Stay focused.** It’s easier to avoid unplanned purchases and stick to your budget when you shop online away from distracting store displays and mall hysteria.
- **One-stop shopping.** Online shopping sites like Coupon Cactus allow you to shop by category. A click of your mouse brings up a helpful list of stores that carry the item you want. With access to nation-wide inventories, you can quickly work through your gift list from the comfort of your home with no frantic rushing from store to store.
- **Price comparison.** With a few mouse clicks, you can quickly compare prices at multiple stores, ensuring that you get the best deal.
- **Deep discounts.** Most retailers are already posting Black Friday prices on their websites, allowing online shoppers to shop early and still get the best prices on gift items.
- **Money-saving coupons.** To encourage online sales, many retailers offer online customers exclusive discounts, money-saving coupons, cash-back rebates or free shipping. Online shopping

also makes it easy to search for additional manufacturer coupon and discount codes before you click the “buy” button.

- **Instant sale notification.** Online shoppers can maximize their savings by taking advantage of the exclusive sale prices, coupon deals and cash-back rebates available from online shopping sites like Coupon Cactus. Email alerts allow online shoppers to swoop in ahead of the mob to take advantage of deep discounts on coveted national brands.
- **Maximum selection.** Because retail websites draw from national inventories, online shoppers can score must-have holiday gifts that are out-of-stock locally.
- **Sleep in on Black Friday.** Nearly all of the Black Friday deep-discounts that drag holiday shoppers from their beds in the wee hours of the morning the day after Thanksgiving are also available on retailers’ websites. Instead of shivering in the cold waiting for stores to open, shoppers can make their purchases online, and then snuggle back under the covers.