

Holiday Care Packages

Podcast Transcript

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Giving and receiving gifts is one of those holiday traditions that never loses its joy — no matter how old we get. Even if you are away from loved ones this holiday season, you can still get that warm gift-giving feeling by sending thoughtful holiday care packages.

Sometimes when we are giddy on holiday music and yummy holiday treats, it's easy to convince ourselves that it's OK to spend more than we can afford to get that perfect gift. But you don't have to break the bank this holiday season. Before that holiday music gets in your system and puts you in the spending spirit, consider these financial tips:

- Keep your holiday spending plan in mind. Don't get carried away with expensive items in your care packages — especially when some of the best gifts are the personal ones that don't cost nearly as much as those gifts from the display in the mall. If you need help making a budget this holiday season, set up a financial consultation at no cost through [Military OneSource](#) (800-342-9647).
- Consider packing and shipping costs when you are figuring out how much you're really spending. Instead of using fancy packing materials, consider using something different — children's artwork, baggies of snacks, the local newspaper, etc.
- Cut down in other ways. Think of different ways to reduce your holiday costs this year. Have a potluck dinner instead of inviting everyone over for a big dinner at your place. Make your own ornaments or table décor this year instead of buying from the stores. Do a gift exchange instead of purchasing gifts for everyone you know.

Instead of getting caught up in the latest “must-haves” of the season, consider gifts that don't cost a lot, but mean a lot. Here are some ideas:

- Homemade gifts from the kids — Depending on your child's age, think of something he or she can make as a gift to send to loved ones. This might be artwork, a collage of pictures, a “hug” (a paper cut out of your child's arms and head) or anything else your child can come up with.
- A recipe that reminds you of a holiday tradition or important memory — Sometimes, it just doesn't feel like the holidays without your aunt's sugar cookies or your mom's fudge. If you have a special recipe, send along the actual food or just the recipe and include a note about why it's important to you.
- Something handmade or inexpensive — Even if you aren't the craftiest person in the world, there are many ways to design a personalized gift these days. You can make a photo book online, a calendar of pictures or a scrapbook of holiday experiences or memories from years' past, etc.

If you have a loved one serving overseas this holiday season, there are some additional things to consider as you put together a care package.

- Figure out if there's anything your service member needs or wants. Great gifts don't have to be a surprise.
- Check to see if there are any restrictions on what you can send. Packages may have certain size and weight restrictions, so before you begin spending, see what's realistic.
- Consider your timing. Priority mail packages take up to 14 days to reach their country of

destination. Depending on where your service member is, more time may pass before the package is in his or her hands. Keep mail delays and climate extremes in mind when deciding what to send.

- Be practical as well as thoughtful. Great care package items could include powdered drink mixes like hot cocoa or instant coffee; energy bars or favorite snacks; travel-size containers of personal care products such as toothpaste, shampoo, tissues and lotion. The package could have items that remind your service member of home such as magazines, crossword puzzles, phone cards, a personal note, your children's art projects or schoolwork, videos or photos, a small scrapbook, a homemade CD, etc.

Don't let holiday care packages add to an already stressful season. Get creative and have some fun this year without breaking the bank.

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