

# Dollar might

► There's buried treasure everywhere – you just have to know where to look

**You're down with budgets:** you've quit your \$3-a-day coffee habit, you shop at ALDI, and get your hair cut by apprentice stylists. But according to a 2007 survey by Citibank, 20 per cent of Australian women would last just one week on their current savings if they lost their job. Scary stuff, especially when you want to own a home, travel the world, or bring up rug rats (which will set you back an average of \$500K for two of 'em, according to latest Aussie figures). So, if your piggybank's lighter than an Olsen twin, check these blind spots for money you didn't know you had.

## TAKE A (TAX) BREAK

If you have money in a savings account, you get taxed on the interest earned.

"If you invest in shares, however, you earn dividends (some of the company's profits), which attract little or no tax, depending on your tax bracket," explains

Katrina Pulbrook, senior relationship financial planner at ANZ. Bear in mind that this generally only applies to shares in Australian companies. Investing is easier than you think: "You only need \$1000 to start with most funds, and to contribute only \$100 every three months thereafter," says Pulbrook. Find yourself a financial planner at [fpa.asn.au](http://fpa.asn.au).

## AVOID BANK FEES

Since the introduction of GST, Australians have been lumped with some of the highest account-keeping fees in the world (many banks increased fees to offset the rise in operating costs). In 2006, the average bank customer in Australia forked out \$95.63 in monthly fees, while customers in the UK only paid \$55.67, according to a study by the Fujitsu Research Institute. "But you can negotiate bank fees, particularly if you have multiple accounts with one bank and thus more bargaining power," says Michelle Pearce, director of Sydney-based Face Chartered Accountants. "The average person should only pay \$10 max per month, per account."

## SUPER-SIZE YOUR SUPER

In 2006/07, the average retirement payout for women was just \$45,000. That might cover the caravan, but you'll be eating from cans through your "golden years". Make voluntary contributions to your super and reap the government's co-contribution scheme: "For every dollar you contribute to your super, the government will also pay up to \$1.50 (as long as you earn less than \$58,980)," says Julianne Dowling, author of *All About the Money, Honey!* (\$29.95, John Wiley & Sons). If you earn more, contribute anyway. "If 'Sally' earns \$70,000 and her super earns 6.25 per cent per annum, contributing \$100 per month will give her an extra \$58,000 to retire with," says Pulbrook. PS: five million Aussies have lost super. Find yours using the SuperSeeker function at [ato.gov.au/super](http://ato.gov.au/super).

## READ YOUR STATEMENTS

Only 30 per cent of credit card holders read through their statements in detail. Your credit card issuer generally allows a maximum period for querying any unauthorised transactions (\$380 at [spanksupplies.com](http://spanksupplies.com) – huh?). After this time, you could foot the bill unknowingly. "Don't get sucked into credit cards offering a zero per cent interest-free term, unless you can pay it off in time," adds Pearce. At least pay off more than the minimum each month. "If you rack up a \$20,000 debt at 17 per cent, which it will be soon, and pay a minimum of \$500 per month, it'll take six years and seven months to clear," says Pulbrook. That's a long time to be carrying a hip flask.

## 5-minute stress break



**Conquer that conference call: reach for the paperclips and make a necklace. When you're doing something purely for fun, you have the control, says psychologist Dr Raymond Richmond. That engages the part of the nervous system that decreases your heart rate, which makes you feel better and more relaxed.**

Bring on the windfall