

Plan Celebrations That Don't Break the Bank

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Parties do not have to be costly to be fun. The recent recession has many people looking for ways to save money while maintaining their quality of life. You can make some very wise decisions about birthday parties and holiday celebrations that can save you big bucks and result in big fun, too.

Saving money and hosting a fun party does require planning and preparation. If you have children, they can help make lots of decisions and even plan the party themselves with your help. A good place to start is with how much money you have budgeted for the party. Determine this amount and stick to it, making decisions that allow you to stay within your budget.

You may want to choose a party theme that will help you choose decorations, supplies and games. If your celebration is a holiday party, the theme may be an easy decision.

Once you have chosen a theme, consider what decorations you already have on hand. For example, if you choose an animal theme, do you have any stuffed animals that could be used for decorations? If you have a reading theme, you could decorate with books.

You can create your own decorations with art supplies and materials you already have on hand. Kids love to be creative.

The activities that you plan can be related to the theme, such as a stuffed animal scavenger hunt or writing and acting out your own story. If you keep your guests entertained with activities, your party will be fun.

Food is also a consideration for your party. You can choose healthy snacks or meals that don't have to cost a lot. Here is a menu idea for a party:

Sample Menu

- Sloppy Joes on whole-wheat buns*
- Baked chips
- Applesauce or frozen mixed fruit
- Carrots and celery sticks (with low-fat dip)
- Chocolate fat-free milk**
- Homemade fruit punch***

Cost-saving Tips

- *Buns can be purchased at bread outlet stores to save money.
- **Make your own chocolate milk with low-fat (skim or 1%) milk and add chocolate syrup to save on added sugar and money.
- *** Use 100% juice and add ginger ale

For several fun recipes suitable for a celebration, see pages 24-27.