

Tax time tips

From now until 31 October, people are lodging their annual tax return with the Australian Tax Office (ATO) and hoping for good news. Here are some tips to get you started.

Know what counts as income

Generally you pay income tax during the year as you earn it. If you're an employee, your employer will take it from your wages. The amount of tax you pay depends on how much income you earn and whether you can claim any deductions, such as work-related expenses.

You also need to declare some Government payments, such as Newstart allowance. Other Government pensions, allowances and payments are exempt from income tax – for example, the disability support pension (when paid to a person who is below the pension age). There may be other income you need to declare, so visit the ATO website or give them a call if you're unsure.

Keep the record straight

Keeping accurate records is one of the best ways to make sure you get the right return. Remember that:

- You may need to supply written evidence of your claims for up to five years from when you lodge your return (depending on the type of claim). Acceptable written records include paper or

electronic copies of documents such as invoices, receipts or delivery notes, statements from financial institutions, BPAY® receipt numbers and PAYG payment summaries

- You don't need receipts if your work-related expenses are \$300 or less, but you must be able to show the deduction relates to your income and how you calculated the amount you claimed.

Invest your return

If you do receive a lump sum tax refund, it can be a great way to get ahead for the following year. Here are some ideas to make your money work harder:

- Pay off credit card debt and save on fees and interest charges
- Put the return in a high interest savings account, and consider it a head start on your savings plan for the coming year
- Make a voluntary repayment to your HomeStart home loan, save on interest and know that you can use redraw to access it later if you need to*

For more information, visit the ATO website at www.ato.gov.au

*Redraw is not available with every HomeStart Loan. Contact your loan manager to find out more.

Tax basics

What does tax pay for?

We pay tax so the Government can provide services to the community.

Why lodge a tax return?

Your annual tax return tells the ATO how much income you received and if there is anything that may reduce your tax, such as deductions or tax offsets. The ATO uses the information you provide to work out the amount of your tax refund or tax debt.

Where do I lodge my return?

You can lodge your tax return online, via mail, using the ATO telephone lodgement service if you are eligible or through a registered tax agent. Visit www.ato.gov.au for more information.

Paint yourself pretty!



Painting is one of the simplest ways to refresh the look and feel of your home.

Choosing a new colour palette and getting out the roller and brushes can be heaven for keen home decorators. But before you jump straight in, here are a few things to consider to help you make sure your choices stay firm favourites and not lasting regrets!

Be practical

Consider your existing furniture and flooring – will it match or will you have to obtain pieces to match the new colour? Those extra purchases to match can be quite costly. Also, does that colour make the room look bigger or smaller?

Be considerate

Just because you're having a phase with a particular colour, does your family or partner have to put up with it? Will that colour enhance or dampen their mood? Is it bold, relaxed or reflective?

Be futuristic

Will this still be trendy in five years time? As much as we can't see into the future, you can still have a gut feeling about whether a colour will continue to inspire. If you were to sell your home, would future buyers have to consider the cost of repainting?

Be a schemer

You don't need to be a colour expert to make the right choice, but you do need to be aware of what your options are with the colour wheel in mind.

- Monochromatic – one colour in different shades (light blue, dark blue)
- Adjacent – colours next to each other on the colour wheel (red, orange and yellow)
- Triadic – three colours that are equidistant on the colour wheel (blue, red and yellow)
- Complementary – colours on opposite ends of the colour wheel (yellow and blue).

Be the parent

If you have kids who've been inspired, keep them under control! That bright pink Barbie theme might not be so popular next year. There are useful online tools that can help your kids visualise what the end product will look like. If they have a crazy colour in mind, compromise, they can have bedding in that colour instead. Otherwise, you could try saying NO!

Useful links

<http://www.dulux.com.au>

<http://colorshemadesigner.com>

<http://www.paintwizard.com.au>

Check it out!

Did you know you could save \$10 just by accessing your loan statement online, rather than calling to request it? Managing your home loan online is quick, easy and secure with eHomeStart. All you need is a computer with internet access, your HomeStart Customer Number (which is on your Customer Card) and eHomeStart password. Not sure what your password is? Just give us a call on 1300 636 879 to get started.

It's easy, with eHomeStart you can:

- Manage your repayments
- Print statements
- Check your balance and transactions
- Make voluntary repayments
- Redraw funds
- Update your details
- Access special offers.



To login, visit www.homestart.com.au, with your Customer Number and eHomeStart password. Contact us if you need help to login.

Three tips to beat the budget blues.



Do you feel like the family finances are constantly being stretched to the limit? With the cost of groceries and petrol on the rise, and interest rates tipped to go up, it's easy to understand why more people are feeling the pinch.

The good news is that there are great resources which can help keep your finances on track. It's important not to be discouraged, take a step back and think about what changes you can make to feel like you're in control. Here are three tips that could help.

Use free tools to budget

Budgeting is one of the best ways to make sure you keep on track – and maybe even make some savings along the way.

Creating a budget involves looking at what you earn and what you spend, and making sure that the last part isn't more than the first.

While it might seem boring, budgeting can actually be satisfying as you get those numbers to add up. There's a whole range of great tips and tools available online which you can use to get started.

One good example is MoneySmart, a website created by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission.

It has tools to assess where you spend your money, and how to keep the bank balance in the black. www.moneysmart.gov.au



Don't panic about interest rates

Almost all HomeStart loans have a unique 'repayment safeguard', which breaks the link between repayments and interest rates. This means that in most cases, even if interest rates go up, your repayment amount will stay the same until your next Annual Instalment Review.

You can always choose to make extra repayments to make sure your repayment amount is covering the interest charged to your loan and I would encourage you to do so.

If you choose to leave your repayments at their current level, which you can also do, your loan will be paid off over a slightly longer time.

Manage your existing bills

Find ways to reduce the cost of your utilities. By contacting your suppliers for a better deal, you might be able to save a few dollars every month on your phone or internet bill for example.

Another option is to conserve energy – by turning appliances off at the switch rather than leaving them on standby, you could save on electricity. Quicker hot showers can also reduce heating costs. Every little bit counts and it is amazing how quickly the little things add up to savings for you.

Sleeping rough for a good cause.

It's not often that CEOs sleep on pavement, but for thousands of South Australians, sleeping rough is a nightly reality. In June, HomeStart CEO John Oliver got a second taste of what it's like as he took part in St Vincent de Paul's CEO Sleepout.

The event brings CEOs and Executive Directors out on a cold winter's night to raise funds and awareness about homelessness across Australia.

Sleeping over cardboard in a sleeping bag, John's efforts raised funds that will go towards supporting Vinnies Homeless Services.

"As hard as it is to imagine being in someone else's shoes, it's important to try. One night of discomfort for me gives me real perspective on what it's like for the homeless," said John.

"Raising funds for such a worthy cause makes it all worth the effort."



Get fit and support youth at risk.



If every step you took was helping a young person build a better life, would it motivate you to get fit?

The Advertiser HomeStart Trailblazer Challenge 2011 is your opportunity to challenge yourself by taking part in a trek through the Adelaide hills – and raise funds for Operation Flinders, a wilderness adventure program which helps young people at risk.

Held on 8 and 9 October, the treks range from 18 to 100km, so you can take the challenge that suits your level of fitness.

Not only will you be discovering your own capabilities, you'll be supporting young people in their quest to prove what they can achieve – to others, but more importantly to themselves.

To take the challenge, all you need to do is form a team of two, three or four people, decide which trek you're going to take on, and start raising funds for this fantastic program.

There are orientation walks, training tips and hints on fundraising leading up to the trek, so you'll get plenty of encouragement to meet your goals.

You'll also find lots of support on the day, including a breakfast by gold coin donation care of HomeStart, major sponsors of this year's event.

Registrations are now open – for more information, visit the Trailblazer website at www.trailblazer.org.au



The home ownership dream lives on.

As home owners yourselves, you'll be happy to learn that other South Australians believe the home ownership journey remains achievable and very important.

HomeStart's annual Home Truth study revealed that although people feel it's much harder to get into home ownership than it was 12 months ago, 78% of respondents believe they will own a home in their lifetime.

Barriers to home ownership included saving up for a deposit, increasing cost of living and personal finances.

You can find out more about the research from our website at www.homestart.com.au



Learn to cook like a master!

Want to learn to cook a Spanish feast? How about mastering a sushi roll? We're giving two lucky readers the chance to win a \$250 voucher each to Sticky Rice Cooking School.

Sticky Rice is an award winning facility located in the Adelaide Hills. Their talented chefs include experts in Thai, Vietnamese and Moroccan cuisine to name a few.

To enter, complete and return this entry form to: **Sticky Rice competition, HomeStart Finance, 153 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000** by 1 September 2011.

You must be an existing HomeStart customer to enter, and you will need to include your current loan number (which you can find on your HomeStart loan statement) to be eligible.



Name

Loan number

Address

Postcode

Email

Daytime phone

Conditions of entry: The competition commences on 15 July 2011 and ends on 2 September 2011. Two prizes of \$250 Sticky Rice voucher on offer. Total prize value is \$500. The draw will be conducted by HomeStart Finance, 153 Flinders Street, Adelaide on 7 September 2011. Winners will be contacted via phone.

