

# A Social Life on a Budget

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## And Trying to Stay Healthy

Many unemployed people today are young people who have experienced student life, and a good portion of that life for many people has been spent maintaining a healthy social life. Even if you weren't a student, there are those who found they could spend more money on having a good time than they can now. Do we have to give up having fun completely? Must we stop being reckless every once in a while because it's hard enough to cover basic living costs?

## Living in a City

City life for some presents itself as that double-edged sword; there is so much to do, but no money to do it with. Travel is expensive, food and drink are more expensive (especially in London), and experiencing the arts costs far too much. But all this doesn't necessarily have to be true.

If you get a work placement, the JobCentre will often subsidise travel costs. Similarly, if you are unemployed, then you can use public transport for half the cost; including bus and tube travel in London. Of course, this can still prove to be a lot of money, but is a real saving when you need it.

With this in mind, realise that the city is not just for the rich. Sites like [TimeOut](#) will list free events happening in the city every day. Museums and galleries will host special events open to the public. MasterCard Lates is a free event that takes over the London museums at night, completely open for all. There is much free music to be experienced in cities; just keep your eye open and ask around.

## Living Outside of a City

The benefit here is of course that, more often than not, there is a lower cost of living outside cities. Furthermore, there is a social aspect that isn't achieved in many cities; a stronger sense of community can mean less money spent on going out. Another great advantage is that everything

is closer and there is more knowledge of what is happening around the place where you live.

I'm not going to pretend that I know more about what there is to do in the place you live in; it just takes looking around and doing some research. There are also many community centres and groups around the country that want new ideas to improve the way they reach everyone they can. New music nights and theatre groups, child-minding groups, and outreach programmes are great ways to get involved.

## The Budget

The tough part; you have to look at what you spend. The best way to do this is to sit down and make a budget. Look at what you have, what you need to spend money on first (rent, food, etc.) and work out what you're willing to spend on your social life. Whether you like to go for a drink, to see a show, or simply go out to dinner once in a while, you have to know what you can spend.

## Alcohol

It seems within our culture that alcohol and socialising go hand in hand. First a healthy note: obviously you shouldn't drink too much too often. Secondly a financial note: obviously you shouldn't drink too much too often. I'm not going to preach on this matter, we all know what's good for us and when we're damaging our bodies. The warnings are on the bottles, and people who drink know the risks.

Now onto a budget versus health point; please don't just buy the cheapest alcohol. Firstly, it's revolting. Secondly, it's worse for you than better prepared alcohol. Thirdly; you're drinking just to get drunk and not to enjoy it, which is a negative in itself. The payoff here is that you're spending more money that you don't have. It's a simple compromise, and a similar one to how we should eat; indulge less often but with better quality goods.



## Friends Who Tempt

These are often seen as our enemies. These are the friends who go out a lot, who may not be concerned about their health, and who like to get other people along with them. I'm not going to lie; I've definitely been one of these friends. It just takes realising what is good for you and what you can genuinely afford to do (both to your body and your bank account).

People like this, we like other people to be as bad so that we're less bad by comparison. Trust me, it's a great feeling before you realise you're all just worse off together. You need to consider who you have the strongest duties to.

You have to look after yourself. This means shelter, food, your health, and the things that give you meaning. You may also have dependents that must come before any other social aspect. Saying all this, you must never feel guilty for wanting to have fun; it's a terrible feeling and it helps no one. You just have to have the self control to realise when you may regret something, and also to realise when may regret *not* doing something. Don't pass up something because you fear you cannot afford it; look at what you're willing to sacrifice for it and see if it works within the budget.