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expense known as the "pink tax."

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By Emma Nelson.

Minneapolis Star Tribune (via TNS)

Anyone walking down the personal care aisle at a grocery or convenience store will see the distinction immediately.

Pink razors, shampoo, body wash and all the items that smell like flowers and boast ingredients like white tea and shea butter are for women. Blue products that evoke earthiness and sports without any flowery additives are for men. But the actual biggest difference is usually listed on the shelves themselves: price.

Women pay thousands of dollars more than men each year for necessary items, an

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[shows](#) people considered attractive earn about 20% more than their less-attractive peers, and for women, personal grooming accounts for 100% of the premium.

“When people talk about the pink tax, they’re talking about that things cost more. But they don’t talk about also that the expectations are completely different for women,” said Nancy Dilts, a wardrobe consultant who serves clients throughout the Twin Cities. “The stakes are much higher for women.”

Factor in the gender pay gap, which [since the 1990s](#) has meant a woman on average earns about 80 cents for every dollar a man does, and the odds against women’s financial success are stacked. Take the roughly \$2,000 a woman spends on being a woman in a year, invest it annually for 20 years, and you’re looking at more than \$100,000, said Ashley Feinstein Gerstley, founder of the feminist personal finance platform the Fiscal Femme. Add up the pay gap for all women, and you’re looking at [a \\$1.6 trillion hole](#) in the U.S. economy every year.

Though there have been city, county and state [crackdowns on gendered pricing](#), federal efforts have been unsuccessful.

“If you’re questioning if it’s real, it definitely is,” said Aimee Hatlestad, an Edina-based wealth adviser. “But if you can accept it, you can overcome it.”

Here’s some advice on how to spend your green on pink without going in the red:

Conscious consuming

Companies are always aiming to generate more volume and profit, and a lot of effort goes into figuring out what consumers will buy and how much they’ll pay, said Mark Jenson, a former advertising and marketing professional and a senior lecturer at the U’s Hubbard School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

“Most of the products that have this type of difference tend to be consumer packaged

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But even in this time of inflation and shrinkflation, he said, consumers tend to have certain products they're willing to spend more on, whether that means opting for name-brand cookies or the pink moisturizer with added argan oil.

“We all make those choices,” Jenson said.

Still, keep an eye out for the cheaper option. As with food, there's often little to no difference between generic and name-brand items.

Consider menstrual products, [which can cost \\$9,000](#) through a woman's lifetime: While a box of 36 Target-brand tampons costs \$5.99, a smaller box of Tampax costs \$7.99. There's also the environmentally friendly option — using menstrual cups or reusable pads — which costs less over time.

Be neutral

Regardless of which items a consumer is choosing, there's a very high chance that consumer is a woman. Across all categories, women make [70% to 80% of purchasing decisions](#).

Those dollars are powerful, and consumers can deploy that power by making purchasing decisions with the pink tax in mind. Step one: Compare prices between men's and women's products and opt for the cheaper option.

“I always tell women and nonbinary folks: Feel free to buy the cheaper products that are marketed toward men for yourself,” said Kara Pérez, founder of financial education company Bravely Go. “Obviously, that's not working on a systemic level, but that's what will put more money back in your pocket and allow you to bypass some of the marketing overcharging, some of that pink tax.”

Pushing back can also include opting out of social norms for personal appearance,

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Find your uniform

Anne Kadet, the New York City-based creator of the Substack newsletter Café Anne, simplified her wardrobe in stages. First, she wore only dresses. Next, she wore one dress, but in different colors. Finally, [she settled on a uniform](#): the same outfit every day, with minor seasonal changes.

That was five years ago. Not only has she saved money, she said, but the simplicity of dressing every day has extended to the rest of her life.

“I try to put all my creative energy into my writing and my art,” Kadet said. “Some people, their outfits are how they express their creativity. I respect that a lot. But not me. I had to make some choices.”

For those who'd like their wardrobe to be more expressive, consignment shopping is a cost-effective, environmentally-friendly option that avoids the dizzying churn of new trends, Dilts said. Taking good care of clothing items helps them last, she said, and when a piece doesn't work anymore, re-consigning it can be an option.

Though clients have different needs — maybe they struggle to find clothes that fit or are navigating a gender transition and preparing to come out at work — the goal is for people to feel authentic in their clothes, she said.

“If you feel like you are showing up as your best self, then that confidence just comes from within you,” Dilts said, “and so then that's what others see.”

Equal opportunities

Just as there are ways to avoid the pink tax, there are ways to narrow the gender pay gap.

Pérez recommends asking co-workers, especially white men, what they make so you

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But also: Do what you can.

“When we have financial wellbeing we can negotiate harder, we can say no to a job that’s not going to pay us fairly. But a lot of people don’t have that opportunity,” Feinstein Gerstley said.

Timothy LaPean, a financial planner focused on working with women and LGBTQ people, has a range of advice for those building financial stability from the ground up. He advises not abdicating financial control to a partner, being cautious about gendered family caregiving expectations and being aware that cutting back on work can mean lost Social Security income.

LaPean also eschewed the idea of a traditional budget — which can result in feelings of failure if it doesn’t work — and advocated instead for automating as many expenses as you can, including savings, and then giving yourself an allowance.

“Uncovering what’s valuable to you and what you want out of your life and how to support that can make it a lot easier to work toward stuff,” he said. “It’s not just, ‘Oh, I want to retire and play golf.’ Who relates to that?”

LaPean said sometimes you have to recognize that you live in an unfair world that might be “racist and homophobic and sexist” and deny you certain opportunities or deal you more struggles than others. But you just have to keep in mind what will help you “focus on joy” and “be able to weather the slings and arrows” of everything else, all things being unequal.

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