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Like nearly all Americans, you have probably been feeling the squeeze of the economic slowdown. Although some experts say that recovery is on the way, if you are like most, you might be asking, “Are we there yet?” As a result, you are still on the lookout for new ways to make your paycheck last longer. Here is another cost-cutting idea that you may have not yet considered. By using a few simple tips and a little extra attention, you can prolong the life of your family’s wardrobe and keep more cash in your wallet. Let’s get started!

Slow Down and Read the Label!
Often in our race to get everything on our to-do list completed, we neglect to read the label which explains the best way to care for our garment. If you wash a delicate garment in hot water, when the instructions call for cold water, the life of the garment is shortened. In addition, shrinkage, either slight or major, occurs. Just ask my husband about his favorite, nearly new wool sweater that now fits my six-year-old son. Oops, my bad!

Wash, Don’t Dry!
In addition to washing most clothing in cold water, another way to keep your dark-colored clothes from fading is to skip the dryer. This is a tip mama taught me as a child. As a practical nurse, she only had two uniforms when she first began working. She hand-washed the uniforms and then hung them over the bathtub to dry. They seemed to last forever!

Remove Stains Promptly!
The quicker the stain is removed the less likely it will leave any evidence. Most importantly, if you are having difficulty fully removing a stain, do not place the garment in the dryer until all your stain-removal efforts have been exhausted. The key to successful stain-removal is to use the right cleaner for the job. Try this website for great tips on conquering stains (on everything).
http://www.doityourself.com/stry/qnacleaning6

Follow Directions!
Whether it’s laundry detergent, stain-removal products, or fabric softener it is very important to follow the label instructions. More product does not always yield better results. As a child I recall how stiff the clothes were when I would help mama remove them from the washer. One day she told me that she finally figured out why; she would add two to three times the

recommended amount of detergent so that the clothes would be cleaner-oops!

When I was a younger, childless adult I used to see boys with sewn-on knee patches on their pants and wondered if it was really necessary-I thought patches were awful. After having children, and especially our son, I realize that patches serve a much-needed purpose in boyhood.

During times of economic uncertainty we can often save ourselves more time and money in the long run if, in the short run, we appropriately address the small stuff; missing buttons, small rips, etc. There is nothing particularly fun or glamorous about tending to dirty, stained laundry or doing minor mending projects. Yet, if your goal is to save money and save the stress of buying what you can't afford, then stay on track. Care for and wear, with pride, the gear that you already have. Just don't forget your must-have accessories for this (and every) season; gratitude and peace. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.