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At some point during my college days, to my horror, I realized that not every woman enjoyed shopping. I thought that a love of shopping was in every girl’s genetic code. Furthermore I assumed all women enjoyed trying on clothes and achieving new looks within their existing wardrobe. So you can imagine my shock when friends began approaching me and asking for fashion tips, while confessing that they did not love or even like shopping! What!? In the immortal words of Whitney Houston, “Oh heck to the No!” I would not let this tiny mutation in their DNA code reduce my friends to existence as fashion “don’ts”-I would rescue them! And that is where the story begins.

After helping many college girlfriends put their best fashion foot forward, I decided that this work was too important to stop with the college crowd. I began helping business women and social butterflies refine their looks by doing the shopping for them. So for those of you who hate shopping and find it a chore to hit the mall, I am going to give you a few painless do-it-yourself (DIY) strategies for being fall fashionable-even within a tight budget.

Peek at only two magazines per year

If you find yourself overwhelmed by all the images you see each month in fashion magazines, stop looking. Instead, only buy (or borrow from the library) the September and March issues. They are the thickest magazines, filled with great ideas for the hot fall and spring seasons. And no, you don’t have to buy those high-priced designer duds, just take note of the style and go look for the copycat version at a discounted price. Target is usually a good place to start. www

.target.com
They always feature popular designers who create low-cost versions of items featured on New York's fashion runways.

Know your assets…and liabilities

If shapely calves are your best feature, then play them up, don't cover them up. Opt for knee length skirts and dresses which accentuate them. Have long skirts in your closet that cover those calves? Get out the scissors and thread (if you have skills) or get the needed alterations. Also, while you are at it, taper the skirt: pencil (skinny) skirts are hot right now. Another popular trend, draping, is a soft feminine look which can camouflage problem areas (like a thick mid-section).

Make your accessories pop

Some of the latest hot topics in fashion accessories are hounds tooth, plaids, and leopard prints-as well as the bright neon colors of the eighties. Instead of buying an entire plaid outfit, select a scarf, hat, or gloves to get that "in the now" look. In addition, a chunky necklace will instantly transform that standard black blouse and pants. Don't forget about the funky textured and patterned tights, which look great peeking underneath your slim black skirt!

Phone a friend

I know that you have at least one girlfriend (or guy friend) with great taste and who loves to shop. Offer to pay for lunch (or cook lunch) in exchange for their expertise. Nearly everyone can benefit from a second opinion when it comes to shopping and it's always fun to have company when doing something that takes you out of your comfort zone.

This fall are you feeling more like a "Fashion Don't" when you really want to be a "Fashion Do?" It's not as hard as you may think to jazz up your fall gear. Pace yourself and don't feel as though you must buy everything in one mall visit-and oh yeah, don't start at Mall of America (too much, too soon!). Try getting started at a strip mall with a Target, and a TJ Maxx, Kohl's, or Marshall's. Use the above simple steps to help guide you toward making the style statement that you always dreamt about. 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.