

Is your pocketbook getting too heavy?

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NORTH JERSEY — Let's face it, ladies, we've all been there. You're standing in the checkout line at the grocery store and you start digging through your purse to find a pen. You know you had a pen in there. You specifically keep pens in there, but now that you need one, you can't find it. Frustrating, right?

Is your bag getting too big to carry? You might want to try these tips on paring down the purse.

It's even more so when you clean out your purse later and find not one, not two, but 13 pens. Somehow, they were hiding behind all of the other junk in your bag when you needed them most.

We feel your pain, and it may be a pain, literally. Heavy bags can cause neck, shoulder and back pain.

"When you hike a heavy purse or bag over one shoulder, it interferes with the normal movement of the upper body. The person carrying the bag will hike one shoulder subconsciously to hold up the bag, which then holds the shoulder immobile. And often, the spine curves into the shoulder," states the American Chiropractic Association at acatoday.org.

What can you do about it?

Never carry more than 10 percent of your body weight. Ideally, carry a purse with a strap long enough to place over your head (running from one shoulder to the opposite hip), evenly distributing the weight. If this isn't possible, be sure to switch sides frequently, and "make an effort to square your shoulders. Do not hike one shoulder to keep your purse straps from falling," says acatoday.org.

Some have a special superpower: they can ditch the handbag altogether. They tuck their license and a few dollars in their back pocket and they're ready to go — and more power to them. But there are those of us who look at them admiringly. Suggest that we leave our purses at home and we react with horror and confusion.

"Go through your purse each week and take out receipts for the week and file accordingly. Dump out most of your change to take the weight off your shoulder. Keep more if you need it for parking meetings," says Linda Anders, owner of COC Enterprises (Cleaning, Organizing, and Consulting).

Most purses are divided into sections. Some have more of these pockets and storage areas than others. Anders suggests trying to find a purse with an interior that will suit your needs, storage-wise. It's also a great idea to look for a purse with a lighter-colored interior, which will make finding those elusive pens, cell phones, and car keys a simpler task.

If your purse doesn't have the compartments you need, make your own. You can buy inexpensive cosmetic-type bags to store the smaller items that tend to get lost in the bottom of your purse. As for car keys, why not buy yourself a clip-on key chain? The most obvious solution to slimming down your satchel is to carry only what you need.

"Be realistic about what you actually need during your day; leave the rest in your car or substitute lighter, more compact versions," suggests rightathome.com.

What are some items you can leave at home? Gift cards and additional credit cards and your checkbook.

"Instead, stash one check in your wallet with a sticky note on it. If you need to use the check, jot the amount on the sticky note and then register it in your checkbook when you get home," states rightathome.com.

Leave those nine different shades of lipstick home and carry only the one you're wearing. Carry a travel-size of your perfume, or better still, get a sample to carry. Carry travel-sizes of other cosmetics you deem necessary, or, where possible, decant them into the small travel containers that you can buy at drug stores.

If, as Anders suggested, you go through your purse on a regular basis, you'll start to see what you use and what you don't. This will help you eliminate excess baggage.

Receipts and coupons are other clutter items that can derail the most careful organization system. Consider keeping a mini accordion-folder — or even a coupon organizer — in your purse, just for such paperwork. Keep the filing system simple, for use on the fly, and empty it of unnecessary paper when you do your weekly cleaning.

Finally, in terms of organization, at least, make friends with technology. Today's cell phones are more like tiny computers with an elaborate array of functions and applications. Carrying your cell phone eliminates the need for you to carry a separate calendar, address book, photo album, memo pad, camera, MP3 player, GPS, and more.