

smartSpending

Smart Spending combines the best money-saving tips from MSN Money and the rest of the Web. Our team of experts on stretching dollars:



Karen Datko, lead blogger, is a veteran journalist in small-town Montana, where her mortgage is

\$310 a month.



Teresa Mears is a veteran writer in Florida. She doesn't clip coupons, but she does shop at

Goodwill.

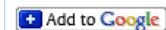
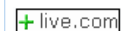


Donna Freedman, our "Living With Less" columnist, is a student, freelance writer and handywoman

in Washington.

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Breast cancer as a marketing tool

Do 'pink' purchases really help the fight against this disease?

Posted by [Karen Datko](#) on Tuesday, October 13, 2009 3:33 PM

Pink shoes on **NFL** players in support of breast cancer awareness was kind of cute. The players seemed to be making a statement rather than asking us to buy anything.

- **Bing:** [How to get a free mammogram](#)

But what about all those pink ribbons on products ranging from Swiffer to chocolates? If we buy those products, are we really supporting cancer research and patient support? And, if so, by how much?

The fact is that anyone can stick a generic pink ribbon on a product and call it good or beneficial. And every October, many manufacturers do. It's come to be an annual October event, like Halloween, or changing leaves, or reviewing your [health care](#) options at work.

"It's a life-affirming month, assuming that you can avoid what has come to be the tyranny of Breast Cancer Awareness Month," [Suzanne Reisman](#) wrote at [BlogHer](#) two years ago, indicating that nothing has changed.

Some companies that plaster a pink ribbon on products donate large sums regardless of sales. Others contribute a pittance or nothing at all. But all benefit from identifying themselves with the cause. The [Boston Globe](#) reported:

Research from Cone Communications, a Boston consultancy that helped pioneer the widespread use of cause marketing, has shown that 79 percent of consumers would likely switch to a brand that supports a cause, all other things being equal.

Not only that, but other research shows that it has a "spillover" effect on other products sold by the company, "which more than compensates for the money given to charity," the Globe said.

Some women with the disease feel exploited. "I've talked to survivors who've contacted me and were so enraged that their struggle with the disease was being commodified in this way," Samantha King, author of "[Pink Ribbons Inc.](#)," told the Globe.

"[MtnMamma](#)" commented at a related post at [Frugal Zeitgeist](#) that she doesn't buy products festooned with the pink ribbon. "Unfortunately, the pink products just remind me of the 'little girl' version of the 'real' thing; so NO, the negative connotation kills it for me."

How can you make sure that your product choices are actually helping the cause? [Breast Cancer Action](#) of San Francisco recommends you ask questions, including:

- How much money is the purchase raising? That may appear in the fine print on the package. Some states require corporations to share this information with them, although enforcement appears to be spotty at best.
- How will the money be used? Again, try the fine print, but -- again -- good luck with that.
- Is this product good for me? That's not a given. Yogurt makers Dannon and Yoplait, which is a partner of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, have decided to stop using milk from cows treated with rBGH, a bovine growth hormone. "The byproduct of the hormone that remains in milk has been linked by many studies to the development of breast cancer," the Globe said. For more about this and other products linked to breast cancer, go to Breast Cancer

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Action's [Think Before You Pink](#).

[Daily Finance](#) did some research on the money raised when you buy various products sporting a pink ribbon:

- Swiffer Sweeper. The package had a pink ribbon and the phrase "early detection saves lives." Daily Finance learned that [Procter & Gamble](#) will make a 2-cent donation to the [National Breast Cancer Foundation](#) only if you use a coupon from a recent P&G coupon book with your purchase.
- Herr's Whole Grain Pretzel Ribbons. The company caps its total donation at \$15,000.
- Bliss chocolates. Hershey Co. will donate \$300,000 to breast cancer causes, the package says. The donation is not tied to sales.

What to do? If it's a product you normally buy, no need to stop -- unless the marketing offends you. But if you really want to help, donate directly to an organization you trust. Or, [blogger Jeanne Sather](#) told Daily Finance, help a cancer patient directly. Drive her to and from her chemo appointment. She'll appreciate that much more than your purchase of pink M&Ms.

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