

READERS DIGEST



Personal assistants are there to help you with all kinds of chores. And if you can't afford one, there are budget solutions.

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Personal Assistants to the Rescue



By Deena Waisberg for RD.ca

Out of time? You're not out of luck. You can hire a personal assistant to take care of daily chores such as cooking and cleaning. Can't afford an assistant? There are budget options available. So, go ahead and hire someone to paint your bedroom or buy your groceries. It'll give you more time for the people in your life.

You may be great at time management, but there are still only 24 hours in a day, and with so many demands on your time, getting those household and personal chores done often means sacrificing quality time with loved ones.

Personal assistants (concierge services, cleaners, painters, personal shoppers, chefs, etc.) are becoming increasingly popular because "people are fed up with not having a life. They're

outsourcing menial chores to have extra time to enjoy their son's soccer game or spend time as a family," explains Mary Ann Westendorf, owner of Bizzy Butler Concierge Services in Vancouver.

You may also want to consider the economic advantages: If you earn more per hour than you'll pay for the service, you benefit financially. And if you don't, sometimes the expense is worth it for tasks you can't do well yourself.

Here is a range of personal services that you can hire out along with some low-budget options:

All-in-One Concierge Services

"We'll do anything and everything the clients needs as long as it's legal and ethical," says Aline Goulet, owner of Toronto-based [Concierge by Request](#). Tasks could include grocery shopping, gift shopping, banking, dropping off and picking up drycleaning, laundry, house cleaning, finding a tutor, raking leaves, cutting grass, and more. These services prefer 24 to 48 hours' notice but will accommodate an emergency if at all possible.

Rate: [Bizzy Butler](#), \$35 to \$40/hr depending on the task, with a three hour minimum. Concierge by Request, \$40/hr., no minimum. The cost of any items purchased (e.g., groceries, a gift) is added to the hourly rate.

Cleaning

[Molly Maid](#) will clean inside homes, tackling chores such as bathrooms and kitchens, vacuuming, dusting, making beds, washing floors. "We design a cleaning package based on the client's needs," says Kevin Hiles, marketing manager of Molly Maid. You can hire them as needed or on a regular schedule.

Rate: Cost varies depending on the home, but the average in Canada is \$87 for about 1.5 hours.

Budget option: Hire an independent cleaning lady. They charge from \$10 to \$25/hr. Ask friends and family if they know of one or search local online classifieds such as [Kijiji](#).

Cooking

A personal chef, such as Corinna Murray, owner of [Personal Thyme](#) in Calgary, plans menus, grocery shops, prepares meals at your home, packages and labels the food, leaves heating instructions and cleans up afterwards. "Everything I do is completely customized [to dietary restrictions and taste]," Murray explains.

Rate: \$40/hr., with a minimum of five meals. Cost of preparing five meals is approximately \$500 (food included), but varies depending on food costs.

Budget option: Try a meal assembly service, such as [SupperWorks](#). The meal assembly store does all the shopping and prep work for pre-set menu items and you simply assemble the ingredients into dishes at the store, then take them home to your freezer. It takes approximately

two hours to assemble 12 entrées. Each entrée serves 4 to 6 people. Cost: \$309 for 12 entrées or \$168 for 6 entrées.

Painting

Need a bedroom painted or your backyard deck touched up? [CertaPro Painters](#) has painters across the country who will take on interior and exterior jobs. Cracks and holes are filled, surfaces sanded and areas primed as well as painted.

Rate: Rates vary depending on square footage and the complexity of the job (i.e., angled walls). And CertaPro generally handles larger jobs—several rooms or an entire house. A job of 500 square feet would cost approximately \$1,550 (including paint). One full day of work is typically required. Use CertaPro's online estimator (www.certapro.com/interior-house-paint-estimator.aspx) to get a quote.

Budget option: Hire student painters through [Student Works Painting](#). Rates vary depending on the room. Typically, it will cost you \$250 (including paint) for a 120 sq. ft. room. Note: the painting season for students is April to September.

Babysitting

At [CanadianSitter.ca](#), parents can look for a part-time or occasional babysitter from the more than 3,000 experienced college or university students. Parents search for a sitter by location, then interview, screen and hire a good match. Reference letters are often posted on the sitters' profiles.

Rate: Membership to the site costs \$39.95 for 3 months; \$79.95 for the year. Babysitters typically cost between \$8 and \$14, depending on age, location and qualifications.

Budget option: Ask family members to pitch in occasionally for free or hire a neighbour's responsible older teenager for \$5 to \$10/hr.

Personal Shopping

Don't have time to go shopping or don't know what looks good on you? A personal shopper, such as those at [Style Impeccable](#), can help. The personal shopper first meets with you to determine your style, goes shopping for you and brings pieces to your home or office for selection. The shopper can also go shopping with you.

Rate: Style Impeccable: \$600 for 3 hours, plus the cost of clothing.

Budget option: Some stores, such as downtown locations of the [Hudson's Bay Company](#), offer personal shoppers for free. They'll select items in the store for you to pick up, or they'll shop with you.