



The Ultimate Guide to Decluttering Your Home and Mind

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Abstract

Clutter can weigh down not just your living space but also your mind. This guide explores practical strategies to declutter your home and maintain a sense of order in daily life. From understanding the psychology behind clutter to implementing simple, consistent habits, readers will discover how small actions can create significant impact. The guide covers room-by-room organisation, daily and weekly routines, digital decluttering, and strategies for families. By adopting these methods, anyone can reduce stress, increase productivity, and enjoy a calmer, more focused environment. This resource emphasizes starting small, staying consistent, and making decluttering a sustainable lifestyle habit.

Getting Started

Decluttering begins with a mindset shift: focus on progress, not perfection. Start by observing your home and identifying areas that feel chaotic or stressful. Break down the process into manageable tasks, dedicating just a few minutes each day to clear a small section, such as a drawer, shelf, or countertop. Keep essentials like keys, wallets, and everyday items organised in one spot to simplify daily routines. Equip yourself with a small cleaning caddy and a notebook or digital tool to track your daily actions. These simple starting steps lay the foundation for creating a clutter-free, organised, and calming home environment.

Introduction to Decluttering



Is your home, your car and even your wallet filled with too much stuff? Do you ever ask yourself how on earth you acquired so many things? Well, here are ideas for you to reclaim your space and start to live an easier life.

Simply explained, clutter is anything we have that does not bring us joy or does not add value to our lives. By decluttering, we free ourselves of things that don't matter to those that do.

According to Donna Smallin, author of *Clear the Clutter*, the clutter in your physical surroundings also has the ability to clutter your mind and spirit.

"Clutter can distract you, weigh you down, and invite chaos into your life. Clutter causes stress, and clutter is one of the main barriers to productivity. Clutter is anything that does not support a better you, even if it's organized."

Ways to Tackle the Tasks on Your Own

1. Establish realistic timelines and goals.

As the old saying goes: "Plan your work and work your plan". To feel a sense of accomplishment and progress quickly, try decluttering for 15 minutes each morning for seven consecutive days.

Evaluate and, if you can, keep this pace or increase the time spent to 30 minutes a day. Experts suggest that the key to making progress is tied to making decisions about your priorities.

If you keep yourself focused on your chosen key tasks, you'll get the job done faster and more efficiently and begin to relish your work, becoming increasingly Donate or Recycle more successful.

2. Tackle one area or one room at a time.

"How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." This same mindset should be used when attempting to declutter. It took time to acquire these items, so it will likely take time to sort, properly reorganize, and toss.

Decide what area or room will have your full attention until you are happy with the final result. Start small, perhaps with a drawer or a shelf. If you work on too many areas at the same time, your sense of purpose and success will be much lessened.

3. Purge duplicates.

Have you ever asked yourself why you have three potato peelers, ten spatulas and way too many flower vases?

Perhaps it is because you could not find them easily or you simply forgot where you put them. As you sort through a room, make a pile of similar items.

Then decide which ones you like the best and donate the rest to charities.

4. Create a sorting system that suits you.

Some people like the system of creating five categories:

1. Put Away
2. Donate
3. Mend/Fix
4. Recycle
5. Garbage

Using this method, you can more easily decide which items are useful, useless or meaningful. Others like the sorting system that puts all similar objects together. Think about a pile of frying pans, all your pairs of pants or all the red tops.

Once the items are all grouped together, you can see clearly which are in the best shape, which is worn out, worth saving or simply not important to you any more.

The real key to developing a strategy is to think about what will help you move forward and what will work for you and your lifestyle.

5. Free up surfaces.

Furniture surfaces and countertops are catch-all magnets. Keeping them clear and clean is a big step forward. Ideally, they should house items you use every day: cutting board, toaster, kettle or TV remote.

By removing as much as possible from these surfaces, you show yourself (and the world) that everything is in order and has a rightful place in your home.

Psychology of Clutter



Many of us have started the year determined to be more organised: no more drawers full of plastic containers with missing lids, or lone socks.

The decluttering craze is led by Japanese tidying aficionado Marie Kondo, author of a New York Times bestseller and Netflix show, Tidying Up.

Charity groups such as St Vincent de Paul are reporting a 38% increase in donations, year on year, as we get rid of the clothes, books and household items that don't 'spark joy' or have a place in our future.

And there is good reason to get on board, whether it's via the KonMari method, or just having a good clear-out. Clutter can affect our anxiety levels, sleep, and ability to focus.

It can also make us less productive, triggering coping and avoidance strategies that make us more likely to snack on junk and watch TV shows (including ones about other people decluttering their lives).

My own research shows our physical environments significantly influence our cognition, emotions and subsequent behaviours, including our relationships with others.

Why clutter is bad for your brain

Bursting cupboards and piles of paper stacked around the house may seem harmless enough. But research shows disorganisation and clutter have a cumulative effect on our brains.

Our brains like order, and constant visual reminders of disorganisation drain our cognitive resources, reducing our ability to focus.

The visual distraction of clutter increases cognitive overload and can reduce our working memory.

In 2011, neuroscience researchers using fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) and other physiological measurements found clearing clutter from the home and work environment resulted in a better ability to focus and process information, as well as increased productivity.

And your physical and mental health

Clutter can make us feel stressed, anxious and depressed. Research from the United States in 2009, for instance, found the levels of the stress hormone cortisol were higher in mothers whose home environment was cluttered.

A chronically cluttered home environment can lead to a constant low-grade fight or flight response, taxing our resources designed for survival.

This response can trigger physical and psychological changes that affect how we fight bugs and digest food, as well as leaving us at greater risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

Clutter might also have implications for our relationships with those around us. A 2016 US study, for instance, found background clutter resulted in participants being less able to correctly interpret the emotional expressions on the faces of characters in a movie.

Could clutter really make us overweight?

Multiple studies have found a link between clutter and poor eating choices.

Disorganised and messy environments led participants in one study to eat more snacks, eating twice as many cookies than participants in an organised kitchen environment.

Other research has shown that being in a messy room will make you twice as likely to eat a chocolate bar than an apple.

Finally, people with extremely cluttered homes are 77% more likely to be overweight.

Tidy homes have been found to be a predictor of physical health. Participants whose houses were cleaner were more active and had better physical health, according to another study.

Hoarding can cause physical pain

Buying more and more things we think we need, and then not getting rid of them, is an actual disorder in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM-V). According to DSM-V, those with hoarding disorder compulsively acquire possessions on an ongoing basis and experience anxiety and mental anguish when they are thrown away.

A Yale University study using fMRI showed that for people who have hoarding tendencies, discarding items can cause actual pain in regions of the brain associated with physical pain. Areas of the brain were activated that are also responsible for the pain you feel when slamming a finger in a door or burning your hand on the stove.

People who suspect they have hoarding disorder can take heart: cognitive behavioural therapy has been shown to be an effective treatment.

Tidy house, happy life?

Participants in Marie Kondo's Netflix show Tidying Up report that her decluttering method changes their lives for the better. Indeed, her first book was called The Life Changing Magic of Tidying Up.

Research does indeed show cluttered home environments negatively influence the perception of our homes, and ultimately our satisfaction of life. The study authors note the strong effect is because we define 'home' not just as a place to live, but as:

The broader constellation of experiences, meanings, and situations that shape and are actively shaped by a person in the creation of his or her lifeworld.

But it seems clutter isn't always bad. One study showed messy desks can make us more creative. The findings suggested neat, ordered environments make us more likely to conform to expectations and play it safe, while messy ones move us to break with the norm and look at things in a new way.

Decluttering Strategies by Room



I'm all about decluttering here on Keep Calm Get Organised. I strongly believe that clutter causes stress and chaos, not just in our homes, but also in our minds. Decluttering your home frees up space both physically and mentally. It allows you to create a home that is tidy, clean and refreshing. A place where you can relax and rejuvenate, not one that causes you stress and overwhelm.

Clutter can feel overwhelming, and working out how to declutter your home and where to start can seem a challenge too big to tackle when your home is filled with mess and chaos.

There are many approaches to decluttering and plenty of people out there who will tell you how to declutter your home and live a more organised life. Some of them offer excellent advice but many approaches are unachievable for the average family. Particularly if you have young kids!

My approach to decluttering your home and living an organised life is all about strategies that are realistic, achievable and sustainable. I'm not about having a perfect show home (even though I'd LOVE that), but I am about tips and ideas to help you beat clutter and live in a more organised, clutter free home.

What is decluttering?

Decluttering is basically about simplifying and minimising. It's about clearing out and streamlining, keeping only what is needed and useful.

People talk about decluttering their home, their mind, their finances and their lives. It's all about clearing out things that don't add value (emotionally or practically) and that are creating a sense of chaos, clutter and overwhelm.

Why declutter your home?

Clutter breeds chaos! Not just physically but also mentally. There is plenty of research to show how clutter negatively affects your ability to focus. It competes for your attention and makes it difficult to process information.

There are also studies showing that dealing with clutter causes spikes in your stress hormones, and it is well known that long term stress is bad for your health.

Living in an organised, clutter free home gives you physical space, it makes it easier to find things, it prevents the build up of mess and it allows your brain space to relax and rejuvenate.

Help! I want to declutter my home but where do I start?

If clutter has got out of control and you are feeling totally overwhelmed, then there are a few steps I would suggest to help you get started on the decluttering journey.

Start by getting rid of as much stuff as possible. Don't worry about doing it in a specific order, just get rid of it! Start with things that can be thrown away. Grab a box or a bag and just start chucking stuff. The less stuff you have to deal with the easier it is. As you see things leaving your home it will also give you motivation to continue.

Generally I'm an advocate for decluttering by category, so working through books, then DVD's, then clothes etc. This said, psychologically it can be helpful to have one "clear" area of your home. If you are feeling overwhelmed, start by tidying up a single main room in your home. Even if it means you need to put things into boxes in another room, start by getting one room sorted and tidy. This then can become your retreat from the chaos.

Once you've done that start decluttering by category. Start by reading Clutter Breeds Chaos & Tidy Transforms: Practical steps for transforming your home from chaos to calm, and work through the checklists that are provided. My motto is do you use it, do you need it and do you love it. Don't keep things "just in case". Be ruthless!

Top Tips on How to Declutter your Home

- Just start. Don't overthink it, just start getting rid of things!
- Deal with rubbish first. Start by going through each room with a big garbage bag and throwing away anything that isn't saleable or suitable for charity.
- Declutter by category not by room. It is less overwhelming to declutter by category (such as clearing out DVD's or linen) than to tackle a whole room. I have full checklists in the decluttering eBook if you are looking for ideas.
- It's about progress not perfection. Don't be discouraged, clutter takes time to build up and it will take time to deal with.

Daily and Weekly Habits for Maintaining a Clutter Free Home



Procrastination can be a nagging roadblock to achieving a clean and well-organised abode. Whether you're a working professional or a full-time homemaker, skipping housekeeping chores can quickly lead to clutter, stress, and piles of a to-do list. Cluttered and filthy rooms can attract dust particles and pests, causing safety concerns and impacting your mental well-being.

However, the best part is that you can turn complex tasks into manageable steps without feeling overwhelmed. Staying consistent with little things can make a big difference in maintaining an organised home. Rather than piling up cleaning tasks for weekends, focus on keeping things organised within your living space. It can also keep dust, dirt, allergens and ailments at bay while leaving a great impression on a landlord when moving out of your tenancy. A well-maintained property can help you outsource a expert end of lease cleaning Canberra service, saving you hard-earned money.

So, here are 10 little things you can do to feel more organised every day. It won't overwhelm or annoy you due to unexpected and back-breaking household chores.

1. Prepare a To Do List Every Morning

Instead of jumping on random tasks, begin your day by creating a simple to-do list. This will help you understand priorities for an organised and spotless home. It won't let you distract from important things on a daily basis. It is good to keep your list as realistic as possible by breaking down perpetual tasks into small and manageable chunks. For instance, dedicate Monday for dusting hard-surfaces, Tuesday for vacuuming soft furnishings, Thursday for kitchen cleaning, etc.

2. Make Your Entryway Functional

Make the most of your entryway by replacing small bins and baskets with large containers and trays to keep this particular section organised. You can also install hooks for bags, umbrellas and keys. Dedicating on big basket to each member can help you avoid overflowing items while ensuring a clean, functional and well-maintained entryway, setting your home's tone.

3. De clutter Small Sections Daily

Instead of waiting for the weekend clean-up session, try to focus on de-cluttering small areas in your home each day. It could be anything- your study table, kitchen pantry, fridge, desk, drawer, bathroom cabinet, etc. Spending 10 minutes to get rid of unwanted items can help you feel more organised and controlled in your space, boosting positivity and productivity. Regular de-cluttering of different areas can prevent dust and allergens buildup, which can promote healthy indoor air.

Tip: Donate unwanted clothes, bed linens, electronic devices, furniture and other items to the local charity to help underprivileged people. Ensure all items are in good or working condition.

4. Arrange Your Wardrobe KonMari Style

Piles of clothes across the home can make the entire space look messy and filthy. It can be difficult to manage everything in a wardrobe. However, this little thing can help you arrange clothing in the best way. Follow Marie Kondo's folding method to create a neat little rectangle that allows clothes to stand upright. Once everything is

in place, you can easily see all your folded clothes at a glance. This will eliminate the need to dig through stacks and disrupt the rest while searching for your favourite shirt or skirt. You can use the KonMari Style to create a minimalist living space like a pro.

5. Keep a Designated Spot For Essential Items

In order to avoid the morning rush of searching for your phone, wallet and car keys, it is good to designate a particular area for them. You can place a small basket in the living area or a drawer at the entrance. This small habit can do wonders in saving time and energy.

When preparing for a move out, pack your personal belongings in a box before the arrival of end of lease cleaning Canberra experts. Removing furniture and personal items can help them address dirt and grime more efficiently and effectively, leading to desired results.

6. Follow a 10 Minute Cleaning Rule

Busy working professionals always face challenges in maintaining a tidy abode. However, with a little change in the habit, you can feel more organised and relaxed. Focus on completing the tasks that take less than 10 minutes to complete. This includes doing dishes, dusting hard surfaces, tackling spills and splatters, wiping down the countertop, etc. Tackling small tasks can prevent them from piling up while making you feel organised.

7. Prepare a Cleaning Caddy in Advance

There is no denying that creating a proper cleaning caddy in advance helps you stay organised and efficient. It is good to keep essential tools and products, such as brushes, sponges, microfiber cloths, vacuum machine, assorted brush attachments, white vinegar, baking soda, castile soap, sponges, disinfecting wipes, etc, in one portable caddy. This will prevent back-and-forth trips, save cleaning time, alleviate stress and simplify the household chores.

8. Go Paperless: Reduce Paper Clutter

Reduce paper clutter by tossing electricity bills and other statements. Ensure you save everything on your computer and regularly scan your checking and savings accounts. This will help you stay organised and in control throughout the process. Save important documents and files in a cloud computing system to keep data safe and secure.

9. Make Your Meal Plan

Wasting food is one of the most frustrating things that can be resolved with a simple trick. Make a meal plan to avoid unhealthy eating habits. A meal plan for the week can help you shop for necessary items in an organised way. Ensure you cross items

off your list if you have already purchased, making it easy to track each grocery ingredient.

Tip: Ensure you deep clean your freezer and fridge before going out for grocery shopping.

10. Set a Timer For Important Tasks

Whether it's about degreasing the oven or scrubbing bathroom tiles, ensure to set a timer to stay organised while completing the task. This will help you stay focused on one task, reducing procrastination and distractions. However, if you are at the end of your tenancy, book experts for a thorough end of lease cleaning Canberra and secure your full bond money without any dispute.

Wrapping up

You don't need to feel overwhelmed when you have these simple and effective tips to implement in daily life. Focus on these 10 little things to stay organised when managing your household chores and maintain a streamlined and hygienic abode for higher productivity and positivity.

Digital Decluttering



Emails you create or receive as part of Australian Government business are Commonwealth records. You must manage email according to the Archives Act 1983.

Not all emails contain business information. These do not need to be saved. Some business information has little value or is useful only for a very short time.

Ask yourself:

- Did I receive or send this email in the course of my work?
- Does this relate to a project I am working on?
- Does the email approve an action?
- Does the email provide advice, give a direction or record a decision?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions, you need to save the email into a system that can manage it properly.

Email that probably does not need to be saved into another system includes:

- messages received for information only
- trivial information, such as meeting reminders and room bookings
- copies of information already in a records management system
- copies of documents for reference purposes only
- general notices to staff
- personal and social messages

Which emails can I delete?

You can routinely delete emails that have little or no business value as long as it is allowed by your agency's 'normal administrative practice' or NAP policy.

NAP is a provision of the Archives Act that allows low-value information to be deleted regularly as part of normal business practice. Your agency should have a policy on how it implements NAP.

Email that cannot be deleted under your agency's NAP policy should only be deleted by your agency's information and records managers or with their approval.

Under the Archives Act, your agency needs permission from the National Archives to delete email that contains useful or valuable business information. We give permission through records authorities that set out how long different types of information and records need to be kept.

Making it easier to manage email

Below are some tips for making email easier to manage:

- Include only 1 topic per email to make it easier to find and save.
- Include information in the body of the email if you can. Use attachments only when necessary.
- Make email subject headings meaningful so the titles do not need to be changed when they are saved into another system.

Where should I save email?

The Building trust in the public record policy requires that agencies manage all digital information assets, created from 1 January 2016, digitally. Information assets created digitally from this date, that are eligible for transfer to the National Archives, will be accepted in digital format only (action 9 - mandatory). This means you should not print and store email on paper files.

You should store business email in a system that can manage it effectively for as long as it is needed. This could be either:

- an electronic document and records management system (EDRMS)
- a case management system
- another suitable business system

If your organisation doesn't have a more suitable system, it's better to store your business email in a network or shared drive system than leave it in an email system. Your information will at least be available to other staff to use and it can be stored in context. Information in shared drives can be altered or deleted without authorisation, so this should only be a temporary solution.

Policies and procedures for managing email

Your organisation's information and records management policy should cover email systems and how to manage email.

Have business rules and procedures to guide staff. Use clear, easy-to-follow guidelines.

Guidelines on saving emails should include advice on:

- which emails need to be saved into another system
- who is responsible for saving emails – the sender, the receiver or someone else
- which formats and processes should be used when saving emails
- how emails should be titled when saving them into another system

Guidelines on managing emails should include advice on:

- how email attachments should be managed – whether they're saved as part of the email or as separate documents
- where emails should be stored – into which system and where in the system
- who is responsible for shared mailboxes or public folders, and how they should be managed
- how email threads or conversations should be managed, and when they should be saved into another system

Guidelines on deleting emails should include advice on which emails can be deleted and when.

Once your organisation has decided on its email policies and procedures, tell staff about them. You will need a continuing program of communication and training to remind people of their responsibilities and the right procedures – and to ensure that new staff know what they need to do. Spread the word through your induction program, staff newsletters and the intranet.

Video Managing email

This short video will help you to:

- understand the value of email to your agency's business
- decide which emails you need to keep
- decide which emails can be deleted
- correctly save and title emails
- use email as reliable evidence of decisions and approvals

Under the Archives Act 1983, email relating to your agency's business must be kept and managed according to its value. It should not be deleted without following your agency's policy and procedures.

Decluttering for Mental Well being



Hoarding disorder is when you have significant and often irrational difficulty letting go of things or throwing things out, regardless of their value. You may want to save the items for future use, and there is a lot of distress associated with discarding them.

This leads to an accumulation of possessions and rubbish that clutter your living areas.

Hoarding disorder is a recognised mental illness, which progressively gets worse.

People with hoarding disorder may have a lack of insight into their condition and often have a lot of shame related to their situation.

If you have hoarding disorder, you may not be able to recognise that:

- you have a problem or if you do you may not know what to do about it
- you cannot use your surroundings due to the clutter

What's the difference between collecting and hoarding?

Many people collect things as a hobby — from stamps to magazines to teacups. But there are differences between collecting and hoarding.

People who collect things are more likely to display or store their collection in a specific place. Collectors are also more likely to use or enjoy their collection.

By comparison hoarders tend to:

- keep things because they believe they have a use in the future — but often these things aren't used
- keep things in a disorganised way, with no specific way of storing them

With hoarding, your belongings tend to take over large areas of your home.

People with hoarding disorder accumulate possessions because it is upsetting to get rid of them.

There is little association between collecting and hoarding disorder.

What are the symptoms of hoarding disorder?

Almost anything can be hoarded. However, items hoarded are often:

- of low financial value such as newspapers
- in poor condition, such as take away containers
- relatively easy to get if needed
- unlikely to be seen as meaningful by other people

What sort of things do people hoard?

Someone with hoarding disorder may accumulate anything, but common items include:

- clothing
- ornaments
- broken items — for spare parts or to repair them
- kitchenware

- car parts
- old bills
- newspapers
- magazines, books and brochures

Items inherited from a deceased estate may be especially problematic. This is because they can be numerous, sentimental, and associated with grief and loss.

Animal hoarding

- Animals can be hoarded too, especially small domestic ones, such as:
 - cats
 - rabbits
 - dogs
 - birds

Animal hoarding can easily lead to squalor. Both animal food and animal waste easily mount up. People in the house can be at risk of:

- parasites
- zoonotic disease diseases that can be caught from the animals

The person may believe they are caring for the animals. But in reality, they may not be doing this very well.

What causes hoarding disorder?

The reasons why people begin to hoard are not fully understood. It can be a symptom of another condition. Sometimes hoarding may be due to:

- mobility problems
- intellectual impairment or the development of dementia
- mental health problems

Hoarding disorder often starts early in life. It is associated with some personality traits, such as:

- perfectionism
- difficulty being able to make decisions
- procrastination (delaying tasks until later, often by finding distractions)

Perfectionism in hoarding is associated with fear of making mistakes, losing or misplacing a specific item and of later regret.

Conclusion

Decluttering is more than a cleaning task. It is a lifelong practice that brings clarity, comfort and balance into your daily life. By understanding the impact of clutter, adopting small and consistent routines, and breaking your home into manageable

zones, you can transform both your space and your mindset. Whether you begin with a single drawer or an entire room, every step contributes to a calmer and more productive environment. Remember that progress is created through steady habits, not overnight change. With patience, intention and the practical strategies shared in this guide, you can build a home that supports your wellbeing, focus and long term organisation.

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