



The Science of Decluttering

Clutter is “a large number of things that aren’t arranged in a neat or orderly way; a crowded or disordered collection of things.” Science has shown the visual clutter around us can have impacts on us mentally and physically.

1. **Clutter can increase cortisol, the “stress hormone.”** A recent study by UCLA found a link between high density of household objects and elevated cortisol. Messy spaces signal the need for future cleaning and the mental weight of knowing it needs to be address increased stress.
2. **Clutter can increase negative feelings and lead to depression.** In the same UCLA study, researchers found clutter effected mood and self-esteem. An overly messy space may lead to feelings of shame, guilt or inadequacy.
3. **Clutter can decrease our ability to focus and be productive** according to Mayo Clinic.
4. **Clutter can cause sleep loss.** Studies by St. Lawrence University and Princeton University showed people with cluttered homes tend to suffer from insomnia or feel tired because they use their mental energy on the stress of clutter.
5. **Clutter can negatively impact your weight.** Studies show that people with messy homes are 77% more likely to be overweight or obese. Also, people with cluttered homes tend to consume more unhealthy food and they tend to have lower physical activity.



Tackle the clutter

- **Do the internal work.** Sometimes we need to address internal issues around “why” before we can tackle clutter for good. Are you emotionally attached to things? Do you buy things to feel safe or happy? Try to determine why you have been unable to address clutter for good.
- **Start in the entry.** Researchers have found that people have lower stress levels if they enter their home to a clutter-free space. If it has elements of nature, it helped even more with the restful transition to home.
- **Work small.** Small successes of decluttering will strengthen your organization skills and build your confidence and self-efficacy (seeing yourself as competent). Spend 5 to 10 minutes a day addressing clutter.
- **Ask for help if you’re overwhelmed.** A trusted friend/family member or professional can help.
- **Test whether you will miss it.** Fill a box with items that could be donated. Seal it and put in your closet. If it hasn’t been opened in 6 months, donate it unopened to a charity.
- **Address digital clutter.** Files on your desktop and notifications on your computer or phone increases mental and visual clutter. Turn off notifications and place phone face down when you need to focus. Clear off your desktop of icons and files. Don’t use your inbox as a file cabinet or to-do list.
- **Don’t try to be perfect.** If you use something a lot like a coffee maker there’s no need to hide it so your counter is completely cleared. Your space needs to be functional for your needs.