

Decluttering Your Environment

Mindful Habits for a Healthy Mind

In the era of Marie Kondo, minimalism, and tiny homes, it's without a doubt that there is a trend of decluttering and organizing in order to reduce stress and focus on what is important. It's very easy to subconsciously collect items that bring no value to our lives, or to let mail pile up on our coffee tables. However, these habits can be a reason for our inability to focus or find peace in our environment. Clinical psychologist Brenna Renn, Ph.D.



suggests “we are hardwired as humans to look for patterns in our environment and to find comfort in predictable patterns and occurrences” (Domonell, 2018), so if you find your living space overcrowded and cluttered, it's highly likely that you struggle to focus or relax on the task at hand.

According to Dr. Renn, decluttering your space can help you to focus and relax. If you need to move several items before you can find your desk, chances are that your environment is distracting, and perhaps overwhelming. “I think about clutter as visual static,” says Renn. “When you're in between radio stations, the static can be very distracting” (Domonell, 2018). Habits of procrastination build up and we end up avoiding unpleasant tasks, such as sorting through unpacked boxes or piles of papers that have been building up for months. Psychology professor Dr. Joseph Ferrari surveyed different age groups to determine the effects that a cluttered environment has on mental health, and his findings were significantly eye-opening. “The findings add to a growing body of evidence that clutter can negatively impact mental well-being, particularly among women. Clutter can also induce a physiological response, including increased levels of cortisol, a stress hormone” (Le Beau Lucchesi, 2019). Therefore, decluttering can help to lower stress and increase life satisfaction.



If you are going to declutter, there are a few important tips to keep in mind to maximize its benefits. For example, don't compare your space to the perfectly curated homes you see on the Internet, unless it inspires you. "Try to be mindful of where you're falling. If you're spending a lot of time on Pinterest looking at perfect rooms, ask yourself if it's inspiring you or creating an impossible standard" (Domonell, 2018). The point of decluttering is to make you less stressed and less anxious, so make sure you don't work yourself up trying to create the perfect minimalist space. Dr. Ferrari suggests that when we declutter, we should have someone else hold up the item in question, because "once you touch the item, you are less likely to get rid of it" (Le Beau Lucchesi, 2019). Finally, take your time. It's not easy getting rid of items that you spent money on, were gifted to you, or don't fit in the trash bin. A clean and tidy space fosters a more productive working environment, so decluttering is surely worth the time and energy.



References:

Domonell, Kristen. (2018). "Is Decluttering the Secret to Less Stress and Better Mental Health?" Right as Rain by UW Medicine. <https://rightasrain.uwmedicine.org/mind/decluttering-mental-health>

Emilie Le Beau Lucchesi. (2019). "The Unbearable Heaviness of Clutter". New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/03/well/mind/clutter-stress-procrastination-psychology.html>

