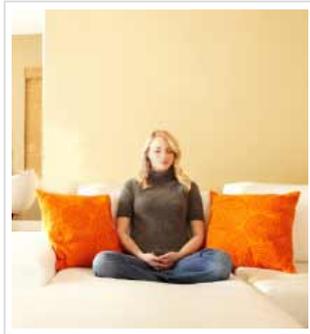




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Conquer Clutter: In Your Head and Your Home

By **Tanya Triber**



Ours is a culture of abundance. Even in this time of economic recession - most of us have more 'stuff' than we really, truly, need. Clutter, whether it be too many tasks on our agenda, too many thoughts pulsing through our minds, or too many belongings in our homes, seems to be a societal epidemic. When we slow down a bit and take notice, however, we find that more stuff actually creates more stress.

Natalia Kaylin, feng shui consultant and founder of [Eastern Sciences](#), says "The practice of clearing clutter is the practice of letting things go." She notes, "Clutter takes the form not only of material things, but also mental and emotional states." Kaylin defines material clutter as "any object that we don't love or don't use. Anything that is half-broken, something with missing parts." Interestingly, she sites that often there's an emotional reason for keeping these things. "Most clutter," she argues, "Creates guilt. It drains us, lowers our energy."

"The best way to deal with mental clutter," Kaylin adds, "Would be to meditate. That's the ancient solution." The physical benefits of meditation are numerous and well-documented, but for Sharain Santalla, yoga and meditation instructor at the [Mandarin Oriental Miami](#), "Meditation is all about witnessing your life and giving you the space to choose the kind of actions that serve you and an awareness of what does not serve you.... Meditation helps you realize what you actually need." Creating space in your mind, then, can absolutely help you create more space in your life.

From a feng shui perspective, clutter contributes to stagnant energy and a feeling of heaviness in a room or home. For example, Kaylin says, "Unwanted gifts are a significant problem. We feel guilty passing on unwanted gifts, but they create negative energy in the home." Inherited items, clothes you keep hanging onto 'just in case,' and sentimental items from your past, like photos and letters are other typical sources of guilt-ridden clutter. She tells clients, "If you want change, you've got to let go of something old." Sound advice for all types of clutter, not just our material possessions.

"A clutter-filled home leads to anxiety, depression, fear, low energy and all kinds of mental and physical illnesses," asserts Kaylin. Additionally, the state of having too much stuff to care for, clean, and manage means less time for connecting with family and friends, taking care of yourself, and nurturing your soul and creative spirit. Kaylin concurs, "Too many things creates separation. We spend time going shopping rather than spending time with each other. We spend time maintaining these things rather than spending time with each other. Instead of another purchase, why not invest in time together instead?"

Easily said, not so easily done, it turns out. Clutter, at least in my home, spreads like a contagious disease. And, I might add, the bigger the mess, the more aware I am of tightness in my chest, an overall state of anxiety and restlessness and the sense that if I have to pick up another toy or wash another dish I might just implode! During these moments, I'm so overloaded mentally that it's tough to know where to start, much less have the presence of mind to sit down for a five-minute meditation.

Thankfully, Kaylin offers some practical guidance. She recommends starting with the entry way. "This is where the energy comes in and distributes through the house. If there is clutter in the entrance," she notes, "98% of the time there is clutter throughout the house." The second most important area to keep clutter free, she argues, is the bedroom. "Bedrooms represent our inner self and our relationship.... This is so sensitive, the area where we sleep. Bedrooms should be very simple. This is your place to rest, rejuvenate - we need to create our bedrooms as a sanctuary." Finally, Kaylin adds, "Take note of the southeast corner of your home or your property, as this represents wealth in feng shui." She's seen powerful changes happen in the lives of clients who cleared out clutter in their southeast corner. "It can be quite dramatic," she says.

In our home, the simple act of cleaning up and clearing out the entrance had a profound effect. It's so pristine, the whole living room feels more spacious. Now, everything has its place. Flat surfaces are kept clear, shoes are contained in a storage bench and nothing is allowed to pile up on the stairs. The coat rack, which had grown thick from winter, has been scaled back for spring. It looks good. It feels good. And, I've got my collector-of-many-things husband on board. Between the two of us we have de-cluttered something every day for a week. Next up, the overgrown, invasive species-ridden southeast corner of our lot.

Reducing physical clutter in the home creates a sense of calm, and allows energy to flow freely throughout. New possibilities emerge and creative solutions to old problems seem to appear from nowhere. The same is true with mental clutter. Reducing the chatter in our minds takes time, diligence and patience, but gives a similar feeling of peace and contentment.

Starting and keeping a meditation practice can be a huge hurdle, but in the season of spring cleaning, there's no better time to start. Santalla suggests setting aside just five minutes a day. She says, "Sit nice and tall, be comfortable and be present. Really try to focus on the breath.... Don't dwell on the thoughts, just let them come and go, always coming back to the breath." By keeping your attention focused on the heart center and using any pranayama or basic breathing exercises you're comfortable with, five minutes will pass quickly. First you'll notice that there are spaces between your thoughts, then you can start playing with expanding those spaces. Just like your entry way, it's the best place to start.

10 Steps to a Clutter Free Life

1. Designate one spot for all incoming mail/paperwork and go through it daily.
2. Unsubscribe from email newsletters, blogs, and retail email lists that no longer interest you. Its YOUR inbox, after all.
3. Before purchasing anything, from new socks to a new smartphone, ask yourself: "Do I love it?" and "Will I use it?" Think twice unless the answer to both questions is a resounding "Yes!"
4. Commit to clearing clutter from one area of your home each day for a week and schedule ten minutes daily to do it. Start with something totally feasible, like your coat rack or medicine chest.
5. Meditate for five minutes each day. This will help de-clutter your mind and give you the clarity to keep what's essential and part with the rest.

6. Eliminate clothing from your closet and dresser that hasn't been worn in the last calendar year.
7. Find a home for clutter-prone items, you know, the things that wind up on the kitchen table, living room floor, and bedroom dresser. Designate a place for them and make a habit of putting them there, every single day.
8. Create clutter-free zones in your home. The entryway is a great place to start. The kitchen table is another good choice. Keep what you love and use, recycle, donate or toss everything else. Be ruthless!
9. Use "maybe" boxes. If, in the course of de-cluttering, you're not sure what to do with an item, put it in the maybe box. Note the date on the box and store it out of sight. If you don't go looking for those items within six months to a year, it's time to get rid of those things.
10. Evaluate your commitments. Most of us are over-scheduled, which is its own form of clutter. Make sure your commitments are reflective of your values and your priorities. Say no to new commitments without guilt and drop whatever commitments no longer serve you. Your life needs space for free flowing energy, just like your home.

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