

IS YOUR *stuff* MAKING YOU *sick?*

Our modern-day obsession with possessions is making us anxious and the planet more clogged. After a thorough, joy-sparking decluttering, could you open your drawers... and find peace? **Christine van Deemter** is here to help clear the way for you.





I have been known to open someone's drawers or cupboards – sometimes not even a close friend, a mere dinner party host – and proclaim, “Surely you don't need all this... stuff?”

Long before Japanese organising consultant Marie Kondo burst onto the scene with her 2014 book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* and her hit Netflix show *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*, I was exalting the spiritual and physical benefits of throwing out all of the things you don't need. Watching *Hoarders* gives me heart palpitations. And I think birthday cards are the biggest scam in the world. (More pseudo-sentimental stuff to file away? No thanks.) Here's why decluttering can change your life – and your wellbeing.

CLEAR YOUR SPACE, CLEAR YOUR MIND

Decluttering my space has always had the added benefit of decluttering my mind. Where other people go for a run or a burger when they feel anxious or overwhelmed, I unpack my cupboards. If my rolls of giftwrap and miscellaneous ribbons are sorted, surely my life cannot be falling apart?

This need to clean and create order is about more than simply feeling smug as you look around your immaculate kingdom. Clutter and chaos can have a severe impact on your mental and physical health. “Disorganisation caused by clutter

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causes stress hormones to spike and can leave you feeling frazzled on a daily basis,” says Heidi Meyer, a professional organiser and trainer with Cloud9Organised in Gauteng. “This can compound feelings of sadness, anger and depression, and can make it more difficult to maintain positive emotions and to tackle the problem.”

Clutter affects your mental wellbeing, she continues. “The stress of disorganisation hinders your ability to concentrate, process information and get things done. Negative emotions and mental stress also affect your physical health – a cluttered space can make you feel drained and chronically tired, while frustration can raise your blood pressure.” ▶

THE *space* METHOD

Professional organiser Heidi Meyer recommends using SPACE to clear clutter.

- ◆ **Sort** – touch each item and decide if you love it or need it. Create categories for items.
- ◆ **Purge** – remove clutter and unwanted items.
- ◆ **Assign a home** – designate spots for all items.
- ◆ **Containerise** – find a home for everything in a neat, functional way.
- ◆ **Equalise** – maintain your newly organised space every day by putting things back where they belong.

THERE'S SCIENCE TO YOUR STUFF

There is a neurological basis for decluttering, too. While having an ordered closet won't instantaneously change your life, it will make it easier and quicker to find what you're looking for. When you know where to find things, your cortex – the part of your brain that's always thinking one step ahead – can relax a bit, leading to decreased cortisol levels.

TAKE BACK CONTROL

This feeling of being in control when life can be chaotic is one of the reasons Cape Town digital strategist Jen Morin regularly spring cleans her home. That, and becoming a mom three years ago. "It really catapulted my decluttering into overdrive. I had to make space to welcome a new person into our home," she says. "I cleaned out cupboards to make room for her clothes, nappies and linen. But as time wore on, I became completely overwhelmed by how our house was becoming overrun with everything baby-related. I needed to get it in order again. Step one was finding storage solutions to pack everything away and step two was ensuring there was space to put it."

For Lize May Gade, a designer and mother of two teenagers, a recent home renovation kicked off a decluttering journey. "I decided it would be the perfect time to embrace the freedom that having older children provided and to start living a more minimalist life – not just in my home, but in general," she shares. She knew she would struggle to let go of sentimental items, so she started with clothing – the least emotionally laden. "It got me off to a productive start. From there, I could move through the rest of the house, leaving photographs until last."

Clearing out left her feeling lighter: "I felt like I had achieved a major feat by clearing bag after bag. It's almost like I rediscovered myself – my likes, my style and my passions. On a practical note, cleaning up and doing laundry have also become a lot easier and don't leave me as stressed as before."

Meyer echoes this transformation, as it's one she regularly sees in her clients. "It's interesting how many clients already feel motivated to get started after my first visit. They realise if they do a little at a time, the task is not insurmountable. It's unbelievable how many express feeling lighter as we clear the clutter and how palpably their mood lifts."

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TEACH YOUR KIDS THE VALUE OF decluttering

Professional organiser Heidi Meyer shares her tips.

- ◆ Let kids play with one kind of toy at a time.
- ◆ Finish an action before starting another – pack away the Lego before beginning to paint.
- ◆ Let your kids experience the value of finding what they need in a dedicated space, instead of always searching for it when they want to play or get dressed.
- ◆ If your kids have fewer toys and clothes that are well organised, it will be easier for them to access them.
- ◆ Declutter before holidays and birthdays to make space for new toys. It's a great way to set up a decluttering habit – and to ask your kids what they really need vs. what they want.
- ◆ Let go of stuff they have outgrown or no longer play with by donating it.



6 STEPS TO KonMari YOUR HOME

If you don't need it or love it, it's time to chuck it – the Marie Kondo way.

1

Commit yourself to tidying up.

2

Imagine your ideal lifestyle.

3

Finish discarding first. Only once everything you want to get rid of is out of the way can you reorganise what's left.

4

Organise by category, not by room. Start with clothing, then books, papers, miscellaneous items (kitchen and bathroom) and finally, sentimental items.

5

Follow the right order. Don't get distracted by other things while busy with one category.

6

Ask yourself if the item sparks joy. Literally hold it and ask yourself this question. If the answer is no, you know what to do...

CREATING EMOTIONAL SPACE

Morin capitalises on this feeling by taking it a step further. She now thinks twice about shopping and seeks out quality and local design to invest in her wardrobe with well thought-out pieces. Twice a year, she hosts a clothing sale with her sister, selling their unwanted wares and donating the money to a women's shelter.

"Decluttering started out being quite difficult but I've become ruthless – if I haven't used something in the past year, it needs to go. I struggle with sentimental items so I need to be kept in check with things like my daughter's art – do I really need every squiggle she's ever drawn? I go through my sentimental boxes regularly to ensure I stay on top of it."

While perfectly aligned socks won't denuclearise North Korea and Tupperware with all their lids intact won't make your boss appreciate you, clawing back control through decluttering is an excellent first step. What have you got to lose? Except, of course, years of mismatched crockery and that wonky needlepoint your sister-in-law so kindly gifted you.

So set aside a weekend, line up your see-through containers, and get cracking. The ultimate solution to chaos, though, is simple: buy less stuff. ■



WHAT IS *minimalism?*

The movement, as espoused in Netflix's *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*, is about more than simply sorting out your kitchen drawers. Instead of focusing on what you have and how to get more of the same, a minimalist mindset focuses on the meaning behind what you desire. Why do you want a flashier car? What will that fifth pair of black heels really bring to your life?

A WAY OF LIVING

Minimalism is a way of living more consciously and deliberately, and focusing on what's important: your health, relationships, the planet, living a life with purpose. Minimalists find happiness not by adding things, but by concentrating on what adds value to their lives.

SAYING NO TO CONSUMERISM AND WASTE

Decluttering your space is the first step towards a minimalist life, but minimalism is a philosophy, not a paint-by-numbers shortcut to happiness. It's about changing your mindset and paying attention to how you're contributing to rampant consumerism and waste. Are you too invested in what your possessions say about you? Are you confused about what makes you happy? Are you paying attention to the true labour and ecological costs of all you consume? (For every cheap fast-fashion item you buy, remember that someone along the production line got shafted.) Are you filling the space around you, instead of finding a space that fits your life? Figure this out, and you'll have more time, more space, more money, more freedom and more peace. Possessions – however well organised – will never give your life meaning. Only you can do that.



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