

Get rid of paper clutter and get healthier

The word clutter comes from the Anglo-Saxon word clotteren. As in “clotted cream” or “blood clots.” The Webster’s dictionary definition is “to fill or cover with disordered things that impede movement and reduce effectiveness.” Clutter is contagious: as things pile up and there are less places to put things, more things pile up, and then there is less space and pretty soon a vicious cycle of never putting anything away has been created.

Clutter isn’t always the toys tripped over in the den, or the unused tools pile haphazardly in the garage. In today’s world, an amazing proportion of clutter is generated by paper. Paper is the hardest thing to get a handle on in the home because there is a perception that paper is limited to the office.

Surprisingly, in today’s world with all its various forms of communication, 60% of the information that comes into the average households is still on paper: the daily newspaper, the daily mail, the weekly forms from the children’s school, the sport participation applications, the volunteer information packets, subscription magazines, paper generated by printing information off the home computer, booklets from special information sessions attended... the list goes on. So, what to do with all those piles of paper?

The first thing is to put in place a **SYSTEM** that works. A **SYSTEM** will **Save You Stress, Time, Energy, and Money**. The exact nature of a system for dealing with paper clutter will vary from household to household, depending on the age and stage of life for its members. An easy place to start is the household mail, because most people tend to carry it inside and dump it on a kitchen counter or a table. But as Barbara Hemphill of the Paper Tiger Productivity Institute says, “Today’s mail is tomorrow’s pile.”

A simple system for mail management begins with a trashcan. A recycling bin and a shredder can be added, depending on the nature of the documents coming into the household, but before anything is put on a table, throw away whatever can be thrown away, whatever is considered junk (this will vary, too, but it could include catalogs, coupons, advertisements). Some people prefer to recycle this material, and some people prefer to shred particular items like credit card offers, but this is largely a matter of taste. Although it is recommended that anything containing a Social Security Number be shredded rather than recycled due to concerns about identity theft.

Assign one person to sort mail. If there are several people in the household, consider installing a fabric wall-mount magazine organizer to the back of door where mail is sorted. Label each pocket with each household member's name, and as items belonging to that person come in, place them in the pocket. *Make certain that everyone in the household knows to check the pocket for paperwork pertaining to them at the end and beginning of each day.* For instance, papers signed by parents to be returned to school can be placed in that child's particular pocket. Or, bills relating to a home-based business can be placed in that particular adult's pocket.

As with any new habit, it takes some time to get used to handling mail this way, but once it is mastered, the reduction in clutter will inspire a continuation of the practice. Learning a fact, skill, or habit depends on making structural changes in the brain. Dr. Larry R. Squire, brain researcher, writes "the process of forming a memory changes the way existing neurons connect and communicate with each other." <http://www.dana.org/news/brainhealth/detail.aspx?id=10020>
The brain is more plastic than originally suspected. It is quite possible to rewire the brain so that new and positive habits can take over and benefit daily life.

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