

## The Healthy Habit of Being Organized



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When thinking about “getting healthy”, three things jump to mind – eating, exercising and sleeping. Eat lots and lots of vegetables and less ice cream. Exercise thirty minutes a day and sit less. Sleep eight hours a night and watch less TV. We are overfed, under hydrated, sedentary, and sleepy.

We are also cluttered and really suffering with our homes full of chaotic stuff. Clutter is both a symptom of something out of balance in our lives and a cycle we can break. We are busy so we don’t clean up daily. We are busy on the weekends so it piles up. We are ever-so busy so we can’t possibly find the time, focus, energy and desire to actually tackle the mountain of stuff that is now inside our homes, cars and offices.

Clutter is defined as anything you don’t use, need or love. Typically, “clutter” is also a jumbled-up, mis-mash of stuff that needs to be separated, categorized and have a “home”. Clutter is hard to part with because it can often be an emotionally-charged jumble of stuff with memories of relationships we hold dear. The good news is that clutter is simply a postponed decision and if you really focus on one decision at a time, you can work your way through the mountain of postponed decisions. This process is best begun by focusing on the outcome and the reason you are clearing out (e.g. “our mudroom is a mess and it’s the first room I walk into when I come home. I want it to be peaceful, welcoming, and organized. I will feel better walking into this room when it is organized.” Or... “This shed is full of stuff we no longer need but have not been able to let go of. We now need the space so we can clear out the garage clutter, won’t it be nice to have our shed back?!”) Thinking of the goal and the emotional benefit to clearing out will help you stay on task when the task gets long, hard, and tiring.

Being organized will help you live longer.

In their book, *The Longevity Project*, coauthors Howard Friedman and Leslie Martin describe a study that followed 1,500 children for 80 years, gathering many details about their personal histories, health, activities, beliefs, attitudes, and families. Conscientiousness was noted as the strongest personality predictor of a long life according to the study. Friedman said that the children in the study who were prudent and dependable lived the longest, likely because they were more inclined to undergo routine checkups, follow doctors’ orders, and take the right medicines at



the correct dosages. He noted they are also likelier to have happier marriages and more satisfying work lives than their peers.

I would add that the decreased stress level of knowing where important things are (passport, birth certificates, school papers) helps us live happier daily lives. In addition, when you're organized, you're not spending your days cleaning up mountains of clutter, you can (finally!) get to those projects like creating a will, installing or fixing things around the home, and pursuing your passions without feeling like you should be tackling that nagging "to do" list instead.

In her book, *Time Management from the Inside Out*, Julie Morgenstern points out that if you have your life time-blocked for important activities, you will feel less stress because you know it is all getting done. Her example was the moment you're in a long monopoly game with your kids and your mind wanders to a bill you've been meaning to pay. Someone who does NOT have a system for paying their bills will be stressed and distracted, thinking "I should jump up and quickly pay this, then return for family fun." A person who IS using a time-blocking approach to their schedule will simply soothe that voice by reminding themselves they pay their bills on Tuesday and they will get to it when their calendar says so.

### 3 Ways To Get Started:

1. Read an article, blog or book on the subject of Time Management. David Allen's *Getting Things Done*, Brian Tracy's *Focal Point* or Julie Morgenstern's *Time Management from the Inside Out* are all excellent resources.

In Morgenstern's book, she accurately connects gaining control of your time like you would for your closet. Each important activity in your life should have a time-specific "home". She includes areas of your life for romance, self, family, spirituality, and work. You might have other categories, but it's a great starting point. There are lots of ways to start "getting organized" but without tackling your schedule, any work you do in your home will not have a reliable maintenance plan to keep it up. That, is the true key to being and staying organized: changing the behaviors which got you here into behaviors that support the life and home you want to have.

2. Get an accountability partner or hire a professional organizer (search by zip code: [napo.net](http://napo.net)/for consumers to find tips on how to hire a PO and search their directory)

We all work better when we have scheduled time on our calendar (see point #1) to tackle a project. If you are bound to another person, you are even more committed. A professional organizer can save you time and money by knowing what to do, in what order, and how to best control expenses.

3. Start small. Tackle something today. Now. Take 10 minutes and do a drawer. Your junk drawer, your silverware drawer, it doesn't matter where. Just do one small act of organizing. For example, follow these steps for organizing a drawer:

--8 Steps For Organizing Drawers --

Step 1: Empty all contents

Step 2: Categorize "like with like" (i.e. rubber bands with rubber bands, paperclips with paperclips)

Step 3: Discard junk you don't want or need in that drawer

Step 4: Clean out the drawer with a wipe or vacuum

Step 5: Put things back into the drawer (preferably with a drawer divider of some sort – a silverware divider works great in non-silverware drawers, like a junk drawer)

Step 6: Label the innards of the drawer (i.e. "sharpies, scissors, tape, rubber bands") so you (and everyone else you live with knows) know where to put things back or what's missing

Step 7: Shut drawer and show it off to your friends or family



Step 8: Repeat with another small project, gradually moving to a BIG project!

We will all keep working on eating more carrots, less cake. Moving more and sitting less. And sleeping more and stressing less. Getting organized can be a wonderfully rewarding habit which will contribute to your long and prosperous life IF you make the commitment to make some changes. There are plenty of resources (online and in print, audio and video) which can help get you inspired and highly motivated. Take charge of your health by making this the year to get organized.

[Watch or listen to Liz's podcast](#) on A Healthy Approach to Organizing.

Liz Byrne

Liz Byrne is a professional organizer with Alchemy of Order in Louisville, Colorado. She served four years on the board of NAPO-CO and for the past three years Liz has enjoyed expanding her business to coaching new organizers. Learn more about Alchemy of Order at [www.AlchemyOfOrder.com](http://www.AlchemyOfOrder.com).

