

The Psychology of Clutter:

Why Spring Cleaning May Help With Your Stress

— Chester County Hospital

The birds are chirping, and the sun is shining. Spring is in the air, and you know what that means: **spring cleaning**.

Sure, there are other reasons to get excited as spring is approaching, like warmer weather and sunny days. But spring cleaning is certainly worthy of its own celebration, especially if you're looking for a way to ease feelings of stress.

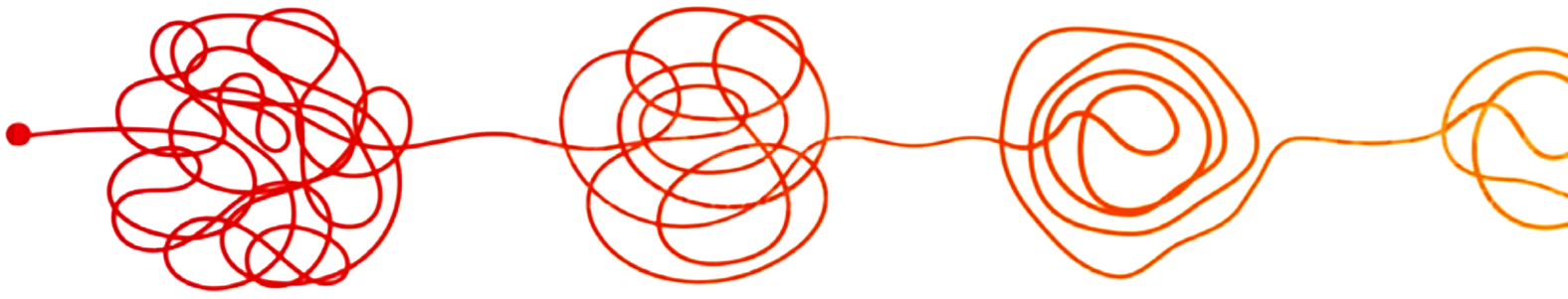
You read that right—cleaning can actually **decrease** feelings of **stress**. During this time of COVID-19, many are feeling particularly stressed, and getting organized may help establish a **positive, healthy** foundation where you spend the majority of your time (especially right now).

On the other hand, having too much clutter can actually negatively impact your sense of home—and can cause some serious stress.

If you're one of the 77% of Americans who suffer from symptoms of stress, **decluttering** may be one way to relieve some of them. Plus, you'll end up with a clean house as a result.

Here's what you should know about the connection between clutter and stress—and how to get started on spring cleaning.





The Connection Between Clutter and Your Mindset

Take a moment and picture one of the closets in your home. Is it jam-packed full of clothes that you never wear anymore (but keep telling yourself you might one day)? If so, you're not alone. The average American woman owns and stores a whopping 30 outfits—up from 9 outfits in 1930.

Let's move onto your desk drawers, kitchen cabinets, or your garage. Are these spaces neatly organized, or are they bursting at the seams with anxiety-inducing clutter?

Clutter is no stranger to most households in the U.S. One study of middle-class American families found that 3 of 4 garages are so packed with storage that there isn't any room for an actual vehicle.

Unfortunately, clutter can do more than just waste space—it can negatively impact your mental health. Too many possessions can cause stress, which if left unchecked, can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression down the road.

When clutter takes over your home, your living space ceases to be a place where you can feel comfortable and relax (called your sense of home). Instead, it becomes an

energy drain that brings down how you view your overall well being.

What's more, managing the sheer volume of possessions in your home can actually elevate stress hormones. Other ways clutter can lead to stress include:

- Constant visual reminders of all the cleaning that needs to be done
- Difficulty using space for work, relaxation, or other activities
- Feelings of embarrassment when having guests over
- Wasted time spent looking for lost items amongst the mess





While there are certainly reasons to save some important items, such as a few special toys your children loved or a sweater that reminds you of a memorable moment, you can't save everything. Too many stored items can take over your home—and your mind.

A clutter-free home, however, is one you can take pride in. You can look around and recognize the hard work you've put into keeping it clean, organized, and most importantly, yours.



Tips to Spring Into Spring Cleaning

Spring cleaning may evoke images of happily dusting alongside birds who are helping sweep with little brooms in their beaks, but the reality tends to be drastically different. It usually involves a lengthy list of tasks to complete—and, unfortunately, no friendly woodland creatures.

However, spring cleaning doesn't need to be a dreaded task. If you approach it with a positive attitude and a little patience, it can actually be enjoyable.

Fortunately, you probably have a little extra time on your hands these days, allowing you to take it one step at a time. Plan to thoroughly declutter just one space—and then move onto the next when you're ready. And maybe open up the windows and play some music to keep the mood light.





Some Other Tips to a Successful Spring Cleaning Include:

- Remove everything from the space, wipe down or vacuum the area, then put back only what you want to keep.
- Designate one bag for trash and another one for items to donate to charity.
- Turn the hangers around in your closet, and when you wear something, put it back facing the correct way. Wait six months, take note of what you didn't wear, and consider donating it.
- Get rid of items if you can't remember the last time you used them (even if you think you "might" in the future).
- Ask your family to help—especially when it comes to decluttering their own spaces.
- Be realistic about memory clutter, which are possessions you want to keep for sentimental reasons. Keep them to a minimum, and avoid keeping items solely out of feelings of obligation.

As you work your way through your home, notice how it feels to be in a clutter-free space. The next time you feel the urge to buy something, remember that feeling—and make sure the item is something that you truly need.

Keeping a clutter-free home requires regular cleaning and proactive thinking. And with COVID-19 requiring everyone to spend a significant more time at home, it's even more beneficial. To promote a sense of well-being, your home should be a place of balance and comfort—and it's up to you to make that happen.

