

Effects of clutter

You've seen it before, or maybe even experienced it. Something new comes into your home or office. You don't have time to deal with it straight away, so you put it down in that place where “things that don't have a home go.” Over the next week, the item either gets left where it was first put, or it is moved around a few times. In any case, it gathers a little dust. The item is moved out of the way, but not put away. It gathers a little more dust. Another item joins it. And another. They gather dust together.

Depending on how many items are moved out to the way rather than put away, you could end up with a little pile on your desk, a little pile on the counter, a little pile in the corner of the bedroom, and so on. Or you could end up with piles everywhere. If you don't or can't put things away, you may end up with a house or office full of “stuff.”

In the extreme case, food scraps will be left, dirty dishes will accumulate, vermin will move in and pretty soon you'll have to move out.

What's the effect of the accumulation of clutter? In the extreme case, there are obvious hygiene and health issues. Large amounts of clutter simply cannot be cleaned around. There are also usually fire hazards and falling hazards, especially for older people. The National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization ([Link1](#)) has a hoarding scale where you can check to see how your level of clutter rates.

What causes the clutter? The New York times ([Link2](#)) recently reported a study by Dr. Tolin, director of the anxiety disorders center at the Institute of Living in Hartford and an adjunct associate professor of psychiatry at Yale. He found that there is increased activity in the orbitofrontal cortex in the brains of people who are classified as hoarders. He suggests that this signifies that hoarders have to work much harder to make a decision about whether or not to keep something and more often than not, simply fail to make that decision – leading to the hoarding problem.

In order to conquer the clutter, Dr. Tolin is reported as saying that “a person needs to fundamentally change their behavior.” Sometimes the change in behavior requires the help of psychologists and other professionals trained in mental health.

If you haven't yet accumulated that amount of clutter, but could still be doing better, what then is the effect on you and your family? At the very least, it is likely to produce some level of stress ([Link3](#)). You could feel angry, frustrated and overwhelmed when you are living in clutter. Your finances may be affected by lost bills or not being able to find your check book. We know that some stress can be a good thing for us, but the effects of long-term low level stress may be injurious to our health ([Link4](#)). You could spend valuable time looking for lost items. It has been estimated that the average American spends 45 minutes a day looking for things.

Feng Shui goes a step further describing the effects of clutter on all aspects of your life such as relationships, finances, and your career. Clutter in different rooms can also affect you in specific ways

([Link5](#)), for example, consider your dining and living rooms. These areas are where you nurture the relationships you have with your family and with the outside world. Do you have to frantically tidy up before you invite people over? Or have you stopped inviting people over because your house is “too messy?” A great book to educate yourself on the basics of Feng Shui is Karen Kingston's “Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui.”

What are the effects of clutter in your schedule? If you miss appointments, double booked yourself, or are overwhelmed with the sheer amount of “stuff to do,” then you are suffering from the effects of clutter in your schedule. You may have to spend time apologizing to people for not getting something done. You may find you jump from one type of activity to another, to another, and back again to the first, without a chance to really focus on any of the tasks at hand. Or perhaps you get lost in one activity for too long, forgetting important tasks. Just like clutter in your home or your office space, clutter in your schedule robs you of efficiency and productivity.

Anthony Robbins, well known motivational speaker, talks of being motivated either by pleasure or pain. In this article, we have explored the “pain” side of organization. We've discussed the effects of clutter and being disorganized. In the coming months, we'll explore the “pleasure” side of organization, being organized, and I'll offer tips and techniques to getting there.

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