

A monthly wellness newsletter from Better You

Clear the Clutter and Feel Better

Studies show that a cluttered environment hurts our mental, emotional and physical well-being.

Constant disorder drains the brain's focus, adding to frustration and a sense of being overwhelmed.

The stress may be barely noticeable, but it increases cortisol levels. Emotionally, the constant search through clutter robs us of time for friends and loved ones. It's a recipe for increased anxiety and isolation.

Plus, all that clutter collects allergens like dust mites and pet dander.

And it can lead to weight gain. Clutter is linked to poor eating choices, lack of activity and restless sleep.

The first step in clearing clutter is to know why getting rid of it is important. It could be desire for simplicity, time to focus on meaningful relationships or increased activity. The "why" can inspire lasting change. While decluttering means getting organized, it's more about letting



go of anything that no longer serves us.

Just 15 to 30 minutes a day is a good start. Clutter doesn't collect overnight, and it won't go away overnight.

Professional organizers suggest sorting items into three groups – throw away for broken useless items; give away (sell) for things that can benefit others NOW; and sort for items of frequent use or that are connected to personal values or purpose.

Resources:

Mayoclinic.org;

WebMD.com;

Stress.org

Three helpful questions

to ask about each item when sorting are:



1. Do I need this to live out my purpose/priorities?
2. Have I used this in the last year?
3. Will I use/wear this in the next six months?

Ask for help bagging items and taking them to a donation site. Or consider hiring a professional organizer.

Once the clutter is gone, here's a good motto to keep it away: "For every new thing that comes in, one old thing must go out."

Keep Your Merry High and Calories Low

Holiday parties can be fun, but they make it hard to resist the temptation to overindulge. Here are some ways for keeping the merry high and the calories low.

1. **Be giving.** Host a party that focuses on bringing and wrapping gifts for a local nonprofit. Or make goodie bags for a nursing home, animal shelter, etc. (Call ahead to ask about wants or restrictions on items they can accept.)
2. **Really think about your food and drink.** Keep water or nonalcoholic spritzer nearby. BEFORE you take another appetizer, sip on your water. Hold your glass in one hand and your plate in the other. It makes it inconvenient to add food to your plate and makes you think harder. Limit trips to the buffet. Fill up on the veggies. Bring a tasty low-calorie party food to share. Eat a healthy snack at home before leaving for the party. Or if you've been eating healthy all week,

enjoy the food and don't beat yourself up later! (If you have six more parties ahead, you may want to use a different strategy.)

3. **Try "mocktails."** If you're the host, consider "mocktails" – nonalcoholic party drinks. Look for tasty recipes that are low in calories – like carbonated water added to fruit juice or Kombucha with a fruit slice. Set up a "mocktail" bar so people can make their own.
4. **Play.** Focus on games everyone can play so they'll put down the food and the drinks!
5. **Dance.** Put on some music and dance! Learn a new dance or practice an old one. Kids LOVE to show their parents or grandparents some of the latest moves! And maybe parents can teach their kids some moves.
6. **Connect.** Talk to everyone in the room, or learn something new about people you already know.

Resources:

ACEfitness.org;

CDC.gov

Flourless Peanut Butter Cookies (Yields 18 cookies)

Ingredients:

- 1 cup natural peanut butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- Coarse sea salt, for sprinkling

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees, and place the racks in the upper and lower third of the oven.
2. Mix the peanut butter, sugar, vanilla, and egg until well combined.
3. Bake until the edges are golden, about 10 minutes. Halfway through baking, switch the position of the sheet. Transfer to racks to cool. Repeat with the remaining dough.

Spoon 1 tablespoon of the mixture about 1 inch apart on ungreased baking sheets. Flatten the mounds with the tines of a fork, making a crosshatch pattern on the cookies. Sprinkle them with coarse salt.



Recipe courtesy of [The Food Network](http://TheFoodNetwork.com); for nutritional information click [here](#).

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