

## Stress Less: Reduce Your Clutter

*By Nan Hayes for Caring Transitions*

Managing the volume of possessions in our homes is such a crushing problem; it actually elevates the level of stress hormones in our bodies. At least that's one conclusion drawn by a study on household clutter conducted by [UCLA's Center for on Everyday Lives of Families \(CELf\)](#). Last summer, researchers from CELF produced "*Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century: 32 Families Open Their Doors*," a book combining candid pictures of American life along with research on how and why our lives have become so cluttered.

The 171- page report is a disheartening chronicle of American life. According to the study, we are completely overwhelmed by clutter, too busy to spend time in our own backyards, rarely eat dinner together and can't park our cars in the garage because the space has been filled with unassociated household items.

Yet, if we are completely honest with ourselves, the study reveals what most of us already know. We have too much "stuff" and for many of us, our excessive accumulation of personal property contributes more to our personal stress than our personal fulfillment.

### Environmental Stress

But is the stress of household clutter really a cause for concern? According to the Mayo Clinic, environment is counted among known sources of external stress. Excessively cluttered rooms, loud noises, unpleasant odors, barking dogs and poor lighting can all be stressful. And while there are certainly many other external contributors, such as employment, finances, family and social situations, any prolonged form of stress may eventually lead to other problems.

The human body is designed to experience and manage sudden stress in order to avoid danger. However, when everyday stressors continue without relief, they become chronic *stress*. Chronic stress leads to the physical symptoms many of us are familiar with, such as headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, and problems sleeping. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress and up to 90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.

### Simple Solutions

The good news is, [reducing household clutter](#) and improving your home environment is often much easier than resolving other forms of stress. By following a plan to address household projects and establishing clear guidelines for managing shopping and storage habits, you can typically resolve your household clutter issues in a matter of days or weeks.

In addition to improving your personal environment, there is an added benefit to addressing unruly rooms in your home. Exercise. Studies done in the UK in 2008 indicate that as little as 20-minutes of physical household chores can help reduce stress. And while it is true more vigorous forms of exercise

produce a greater risk reduction, moderate forms of cleaning and organizing also help reduce fatigue and improve alertness and cognitive function that may have been compromised by environmental stressors. More simply put, when physical activity goes up, physical stress goes down.

### **Stress-Free Decluttering**

In some cases, the very *process* of decluttering can become stressful. Depending on how much clutter you have in your home, there could be many details to manage; such as finding local charities or sorting items to sell, donate, throw out or give to friends and family. The volume of personal property can seem overwhelming and often projects may seem to get much worse before they get better.

At [Caring Transitions](#), we know that the biggest obstacle to decluttering is taking that first step forward and then proceeding in a way that will not create additional anxiety. As leading experts in the field of decluttering and downsizing, we provide these basic guidelines for stress-free decluttering:

- **Keep it simple.** Gaining control over clutter can help reduce our stress, but the decluttering process itself can create a whole new form of stress. Consumer magazines and TV shows about redesigning, staging, organizing and decluttering can make us feel inadequate or behind the times if we chose to continue living with “ordinary” clutter. The trick? Do what feels right for you. Walk through each room in your house and make a note of the things that do and do not make you feel less than comfortable.
- **Prioritize and Plan:** Once you have your list, prioritize the projects based on personal safety, time, ability and budget.
- **Keep it achievable.** Goal setting is most successful when you establish goals that you can actually obtain. You do not need to clean the entire garage in a day. Spend time in one area; complete it and then move on to the next. Be realistic in what you can accomplish during a particular timeframe. As you finish small tasks, keep a record of what you did and how long it took. This will help you manage larger projects and avoid frustration.
- **Set a schedule.** Whether you do 20 minutes a day or reserve a whole weekend to declutter, set aside dedicated time with no other distractions. Then stick to the schedule.
- **Find support.** Articles and self-help books can help you get organized and make decisions. The professionals at [Caring Transitions](#) can provide [FREE in-home consultation](#) as well as provide all the labor, resources and support you need for all of your downsizing, decluttering, [estate sale](#), [online auction](#) or moving projects.

---

## **About Caring Transitions**

As life changes, it may become necessary to leave a familiar home and part with personal belongings in order to downsize and relocate to a smaller home or retirement community. At Caring Transitions, we help our clients understand the process, evaluate their options and make informed decisions that suit their best interests. We are committed to making each client’s experience positive by minimizing stress and maximizing results.

Visit us online at [www.CaringTransitions.com](http://www.CaringTransitions.com).

Call Caring Transitions for a Consultation – (800) 647-0766

Christopher Seman, President of Caring Transitions  
10700 Montgomery Road, Suite 300  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45242