

Five Ways to Declutter Your Body and Mind

Clearing physical spaces can help clear our mental spaces as well. Try some of these tips for both.

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I don't know about you, but I feel so much better when my environment is neat and organized. After a long day of work, coming home to a neat space is like coming home to myself. It is a refuge, truly, and I feel soothed.

When I wake up in the morning, before the sun comes up, and stumble to my espresso machine, bleary eyed and still ridiculously tired, a neat space seems to beckon me to use my time in the way I so desire. I try to wake up early to [practice mindfulness](#), set an intention for the day, and then either finish patient notes from the day before, or do some writing—although I'd like this to happen more regularly than it does, I am gentle with myself when it doesn't.

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I do know, however, that there are certain ingredients that will immediately create an impasse for all that to manifest. That is waking up to a messy space. Waking up to a messy space becomes a metaphor for the brain fog and overwhelming feelings that begin to ensue. Decluttering is hard, but it is worth it. The effects impact your mind and body. Some of the behavioral work with my patients focuses on paced, organized schedules as well as cognitive work regarding the “letting go” of the clutter that many of us

create to protect ourselves. This idea is vast, and I will write a post about that in its entirety at a later time.

My patients find that as the clutter begins to lessen, they feel a clearing in their minds that they never thought was possible. This is a kind of outside-in decluttering. A physical clearing can help create space in the mind. For more on de-cluttering the space around you, I recommend Marie Kondo's [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up](#).

Here's the thing though, just as we need to declutter our physical surroundings, we need to declutter from the inside-out. Literally, we need to spring clean and give our neural circuitry the room to grow. The brain is now known to be a neuroplastic entity (see my recent Mindful.org post for more on that: "[How the Brain Changes When You Meditate](#)"). It is no longer static and we can change the neurofunctional space that all the crud and chaos seemed to take up.

Personally, I find this comforting and empowering. What I have found, through my own tedious work, as well as the perseverance of my patients, is that this space is a place where we can take actionable steps to feeling better, inside-out.

1. Stretch the body, stretch the mind

Sometimes it seems like all I can do to calm down, to

declutter, to make space, is to flow with breath and body through a sequence of yoga poses. Sometimes I go from downward dog to plank to upward dog and back. Sometimes I start from a Warrior II pose then straighten my front leg in sync with my breath, which is also now in sync to my hands moving from out to the sides to above my head. (Try these [10 yoga poses to practice before meditation](#).)

2. Listen to/sing your favorite song

When I am particularly overwhelmed by negative thought clutter, and it seems as though the ruminations won't end, I like to recite a poem. I literally recite my favorite poem (which I committed to knowing by memory for this very purpose), which happens to be Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver. I become so engaged in reciting the poem, mindful of both the rhythm and meaning of the words, that I let go of all other thoughts. My brain can't both recite a poem and ruminate at once! You don't have to use a poem...you can use a favorite song, monologue, etc.

3. Get up and move

One of my favorite ways to instantly declutter is to literally *Bust a Move!* I bust out one of my favorite dance moves, and even get the added bonus of the endorphins. I grew up with tapes, not CD's, so can anyone say *THE RUNNING MAN* (or

the ELECTRIC SLIDE)! If you're at work and your office mates might not approve of your sweet moves, you can try [mindful walking](#).

4. Remember the good times

While I don't purport to live in the past by way of having regrets and overanalyzing situations which are long forgotten, I do like to Mosey Down (good) Memory Lane. I find it such a treat to close my eyes and picture myself at that concert at the Boston House of Blues, that time my dad took me to my first baseball game... peanuts and all, playing my guitar solo in front of an audience, passing my licensing exam, getting those roses...the list can go on and on. I get to go back to that time and place, to feel the sensations as I surrender to sweet nostalgia.

5. Practice gratitude

One of the most effective ways to clear out mental clutter is to say thank you. You don't necessarily have to have a god, or the universe, or anyone in particular in mind. Just a general "thank you" to express gratitude for everything you are or aren't, and everything you have or don't have. This is by no means easy, and I do NOT mean to placate you or undermine any difficulty you are experiencing. But there is actual literature in the field of positive psychology that

[expressing gratitude](#) is a huge part of mental health, which includes stress reduction.

For those of us who want to have at least some control in such an uncertain life, we can actually make the choice to declutter our minds, and in doing so we actually change the map of our lives.