

CALM HOME, HAPPY YOU

More than half of Americans say they're stressed-out by clutter but don't know how to deal with it. So how's this for easy: a month's worth of quick, doable tidy-ups to make your life a bit more sane, care of our genius cleaning experts. Junk piles, you've been warned.

BY LASHIEKA HUNTER PHOTOGRAPHED BY LARA ROBBY

DAY 1

Clear a surface, any surface

Zoom in on one or two clutter hot spots that are small enough to be swept clean right away, like your nightstand or coffee table. It's low-hanging fruit, but it'll make your home feel just a little bit neater and inspire you to whip other areas into shape, says Melissa Michaels, the author of *Make Room for What You Love*.

→ **SIMPLIFY IT** Shoo the mess off one surface into a box, then walk around putting stuff back in its rightful place (or the trash). That's it—you're done for the day.



DAY 2

SCRAP YOUR TO-DO LIST

Instead, make a not-to-do list. Jot down all the organizing projects you think are important, and then decide which, realistically, will just have to wait. The best way to figure out what makes the cut and what doesn't? For each, ask yourself if doing it would help you move through your day with fewer aggravating hiccups. If the answer is yes, it gets top priority.

DAY 3



Pick a spot for odds and ends

Surprise! We're not hating on your junk drawer. In fact, that space where your spare keys, Scotch tape, and extra pens roam free can serve a legit purpose (as long as you don't go overboard—limit yourself to one or two small ones, please). "Sometimes we need the blessed relief of opening a drawer and tossing in things that don't yet have a home," says Karen Kingston, the author of *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui*. Still, junk drawers need attention so they don't overflow; show yours a little love today.

→ **SIMPLIFY IT** Tip out the contents and sort them into three piles: items to put away, items to chuck, and items you don't know what the heck to do with. You get to put those back until the next cleanup. But if you still haven't come up with a plan for them by then, deep-six 'em.

DAY 4

Say no to paper bills They have a funny way of turning into paper clutter. If you haven't gone digital with your bill paying yet, go online and set up at least one today.

DAY 5



'Retire Old Makeup

It could be harboring bacteria or fungi you don't want on your skin anyway. Other cosmetics to dump: anything in a cracked or icky case or an unflattering shade, beauty extras you just don't need (you only have one face), and perfumes you're so over. Hand those last two off to a friend, or mark any unopened, unexpired makeup for donation—lots of charitable groups accept them.

→ **SIMPLIFY IT** Brands often list expiration dates, but a general rule is to ditch lipstick and foundation after a year and mascara after three months (that dark, moist tube is everything to germs). And trash any cosmetic that smells funky or has changed consistency.

DAY 6

Disown owner's manuals Most are posted online, so you don't need paper copies. Plus, the digital ones are easier to search through.

DAY 7



MAKE THE KITCHEN LESS MUGGY

You can never have too many coffee cups—said no one ever. Pull yours out of the cupboard, pick about 10 that you like and your family actually uses, and donate the rest, suggests Sara Pedersen, creator of the blog *Time to Organize*.

STUDIO D. STYLING BY JULIE FLYNN FOR HALLEY RESOURCES

DAY 8

Give old socks the boot

Throw out any that have holes or have been living the single life without their mate. Then fold whatever's left. "The drawer will be neater, and you'll fit more in it," says Barbara Reich, the author of *Secrets of an Organized Mom*. Plus, you'll quickly be able to grab the pair that works, instead of fumbling around at 7 A.M.

DAY 9



RECYCLE AHEAD

To get rid of paper junk before it even reaches your counter, stick a recycling bin wherever you open your mail, says the blog *Becoming Minimalist*. You'll be more apt to toss advertisements or coupons—that is, things that lure you into buying more stuff you don't need.

DAY 10

Lose outdated fitness gadgets

We love the '90s too, but exercise equipment purchased back when the Macarena was still hot has probably outlived its value. Dump anything that's been collecting dust. Then stash the good stuff—say, resistance bands and mini weights—all together in a basket, box, or storage ottoman close to where you use them. That way, there's no clutter and no excuse for not working out.

DAY 11

Brighten your closets Sticking a battery-operated LED light in each of them will change your life. Once you can see the depths of a space better, it's easier to keep it neat.

DAY 12

Part with kid art Those bins full of projects your children made ages ago? Instead of holding on to the physical items, take photos of them. The memories are what count, and pics can trigger those.

→ **SIMPLIFY IT** If there are a few you can't bear to part with, put them on display instead of leaving them buried in the basement.

DAY 13

Make a shredding date

Chains like Office Depot will shred sensitive paperwork for free during tax season. Check their websites for details and set a calendar reminder to head in.

DAY 14

Get off annoying mailing lists

To cut down on credit card offers you just have to tear up, log on to OptOutPrescreen.com or call 888-5-OPT-OUT, suggests the Federal Trade Commission. These are run by the major consumer reporting companies, and you can ask to stop receiving offers for the next five years, or even permanently.

DAY 15



tidy up your takeout menus

Trash the ones you've had since the Bush administration, along with any you and your family know by heart or can easily bookmark online. Give the rest a more discreet (and accessible) home in a vinyl folder tacked inside a pantry door.

DAY 16

Do a deep dive into your wardrobe and grab all the "someday" items (as in "This dress is a few sizes too small but might fit someday"). Outfits for your fantasy self only take up space that your real self needs. Boost clothing karma by giving them to a pal or to charity.

DAY 17



ORGANIZE THAT FRIDGE

If yours is like a black hole—leftovers go in, but they don't always come out—take a sec and chuck anything that's outdated or unidentifiable. Then pull shorter items to the front, Pedersen says. That'll make it harder for food to get lost and easier for you to see what's there before a grocery store run.

DAY 18

Clutter-proof the living room

Tell your family that your main living space now has a strict cart-and-carry policy, says Cynthia Ewer, the author of *Cut the Clutter*. That means while everyone's welcome to hang out or do homework there, any items they haul in must be collected when they leave.

→ **SIMPLIFY IT** Stock up on baskets with handles to make it easier for kids (and grown-ups) to ferry stuff in and out.

DAY 19

Use a label maker "It creates a visual cue to put things where they belong," says Donna Smallin Kuper, creator of the blog *Unclutter*. Try it on pantry or linen closet shelves.

CLUTTER, BUSTED

DAY 20



Call in charities

Some, like the Salvation Army, let you schedule pickups online, so you can clear out those books and old clothes you boxed up but never got around to dropping off at a donation bin. Remember to get a receipt for your taxes.

DAY 21

Find a clutter buddy Like your fitness-minded friend who trades healthy recipes with you, a pal who shares your passion for decluttering can inspire you and keep you accountable, Kuper says. Check in with each other regularly and share what you've crossed off your list.

DAY 22



**DIVIDE
&
CONQUER**

Pick one drawer you use every day and organize it with a divider—you'll love the results. We spend a year of our lives looking for lost items, according to the National Association of Professional Organizers, but dividers make it easy to find what you need and stop small items from shifting around when you open or close a drawer.

➔ **SIMPLIFY IT** Save yourself \$20 and make your own dividers using empty shoe boxes.

DAY 23

Ditch the clutter goggles

You can get used to ignoring your mess with enough practice, so work on zeroing in on items that don't belong in a space, says Rita Emmett, the author of *The Clutter-Busting Handbook*.

➔ **SIMPLIFY IT** Starting now, glance over your shoulder every time you leave a room. Anything out of place? Take it to the right spot.

DAY 24

Check for lids Give food containers a new job requirement: They must have lids, or to the recycling bin they go. To cut down on strays, store all lids together.

DAY 25



Fence in mess

Stick pretty serving trays here and there. Like bins, they help you corral smaller items together in one place (say, napkins and condiments in your kitchen, or beauty products in your bathroom).

DAY 26

Dejunk your jewelry

Empty tangled costume pieces onto a table, thank them for the good times, and weed out anything that's chipped, broken, or out of style.

DAY 27

Martha up your sheets

Pros swear by this classic Martha Stewart move: When you're putting away laundry, stick folded sheets inside a matching pillowcase to keep sets together and make them easier to track down.

DAY 28



SCRAP 'EM!

Decorative pillows are like bunny rabbits—get a few cute ones and pretty soon you're overrun. Scaling back is an easy way to make a room feel less chaotic, says Ruth Soukup, the author of *Unstuffed: Decluttering Your Home, Mind & Soul*. Take some away for a month and see if you miss them.

DAY 29

Look for sneaky storage spaces

There are spots around the house—like the backs of doors or sides of cabinets—you tend to ignore. But with a few good hooks, they could help you get stuff out of the way. Pick which ones you'll use.

DAY 30



Eliminate expired meds

Get rid of any that have changed color or odor or that are in unmarked containers and can't immediately be identified. Dump them out of the bottles and into a plastic bag with kitty litter or coffee grounds before tossing them.

➔ **SIMPLIFY IT** Ask your pharmacy if it hosts drug "take-back" programs, or check sites like DisposeMyMeds.org for initiatives in your area.

DAY 31

Relax Take a deep breath, look around your space, and celebrate your progress. Your home is calmer, and now so are you.