

Clutter's Hidden Health Toll

Clutter can be hazardous to your health. Aside from the well-documented impact clutter has on a home's aesthetics, it can affect your physical well-being, too. If home is where the heap is, you'll be more stressed, less healthy and pretty irritable.

Closets: Overstuffed closets make thorough cleaning impossible. Dust can infiltrate clothing fibers and trigger an allergic reaction. Exercise the excess, and you'll have room to attack the dust bunnies. Donate clothes in good condition to a thrift shop, homeless shelter or arrange for a pick-up from a favorite charity.

Bedroom: Bills, paperwork or exercise equipment in the bedroom attract negative energy that can sabotage rest and relaxation, says professional organizer Ariane Benoit of OrganizingForHealth.com. Everything in the bedroom should be geared to supporting sleep and giving your mind a chance to unwind.

Bathroom: A medicine cabinet full of expired drugs is the hallmark of a dysfunctional bathroom. Old medications lose their potency or, worse, make you ill. Ditch them, but don't flush them—they could be an environmental hazard. Some pharmacies take back old meds to ensure proper disposal. Contact the Poison Control Center, (800) 222-1222, to find the best way to discard expired medicines in your area. While you're at it, toss old cosmetics, which can cause breakouts and eye infections.

Family room: Packratitis is a condition that can aggravate sinusitis. Tables and floors covered in toys, magazines and DVDs mean the chances of a clean sweep are miniscule. Don't just clear a path—cut the glut from your home. List unused items on the Freecycle Network, the grassroots organization that allows you to recycle your no-longer-wanted goods by offering them free to others (www.freecycle.org).

Kitchen: Cleaning supplies left haphazardly on countertops emit low-level odors, troublesome to people with non-allergic asthma, says Jonathan A. Bernstein, M.D. Switch to nontoxic cleansers and store them safely behind closed doors. Even cleaners with natural ingredients can have potentially irritating respiratory-system effects.

—Iyna Bort Caruso

For more on clearing clutter, see "3 Steps to Clutter-Free Living," page 64.



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