



## Clearing office clutter is good for your health

Keeping a clean workspace can be a challenge. Sometimes it's easier to just let things pile up and try to ignore the mess. It takes time and effort to de-clutter. Once you do make the decision to organize your space, it can be very stressful because the "stuff" you are holding onto might carry sentimental value or you feel that you'll need it in the future.

The problem with a cluttered desk or work environment is that it can be adding to your stress levels and may reduce your ability to focus!

### Productivity

A clear workspace can help to promote a clear and focused mindset. According to the *Journal of Neuroscience*, looking at several things at once can overwork your visual cortex, which causes your brain to have a decreased ability to process information. Focusing on one thing at a time allows for better quality of work and more efficient use of time.

### Emotional health

Clutter can have a huge impact on your mental and emotional health. When you have piles of items that you are saving for those "just in-case" moments, it may promote a sense of fear of the future. Also, when your space is filled with old files, documents, and memorabilia it keeps you in the past. Both of these factors can prevent you from having a "future thinking" mindset and keep you from moving forward in your life.

### Eat better!

Many people see food as an emotional comfort. When they are stressed they are inclined to use food to make them feel better, often making unhealthy choices. Working in a messy environment can cause your brain to be stressed out. A study in the *Journal of Psychological Science* compared snack choices of those in a neat room to those in a disordered room. The study found that those in the neat room made healthier food choices. When that 3 p.m. slump hits and you reach for a treat, double check your work environment and see if a cluttered work area could be contributing to that food choice.

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## Top tips to de-clutter

- **Determine your clutter tolerance.** Some people get very little accomplished if their workspace is messy, while others need a little bit of clutter to feel inspired and motivated. Determine where you fit and organize your space accordingly.
- **Create guidelines.** Once you have determined your tolerance for clutter, set guidelines. For example, set limits on the number of pens and pencils you have at your desk and how long you will hold onto files.
- **Give everything a home.** Use small baskets, paper organizers, folders, and desk accessories to give everything a space. This way, you know exactly where everything is kept, which will help you work more efficiently. If you are the type of person who works better with a little bit of mess designate one drawer or cupboard for that mess so it can be contained.
- **Put things back.** When everything has a home, it is easy to put things back when you are finished with them instead of leaving them lying around to get lost in a pile somewhere for six months.
- **Monthly cleanup.** Pick one day each month to clean-up your workspace. There might be some days where you are in a rush and cannot put thing back in their “home”, or maybe you accumulated some new items that don’t have a home yet; this monthly clean-up will allow you to get these things organized. Also, your monthly clean-up can be a time to reflect on what has or has not worked in terms of organization and make small tweaks to better suit you.

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## Fostering mindfulness

In the past ten years, *mindfulness* has become a buzzword that you will hear in doctor's offices, schools and universities, hospitals, workplaces and many other environments. What exactly is it and how can it benefit your day-to-day life? Let's unpack what mindfulness is and go over some simple ways you can incorporate it in to your life to achieve its benefits.

### What is mindfulness?

The practice of mindfulness has its roots in Buddhist meditation but has been adapted away from any religious or spiritual traditions or beliefs. Contemporary, western mindfulness as it is taught in educational and health contexts, is a practice of being **attentive**, **aware** and **present** to one's sensations and thoughts, in the moment.

Mindfulness can be a formal practice such as yoga or meditation but it can also be something that you incorporate into what you already do – it is at its most basic, the practice of being fully present in the moment, no matter what the moment might consist of.

### Why is mindfulness important?

Psychologists have been busy researching mindfulness' benefits and there is now a body of evidence that proves just how effective it is. Here are some of the ways mindfulness can improve your life:

- Reduces stress
- Improves memory and concentration
- Lessens emotional reactivity
- Increases empathy

For people living with mental health concerns like anxiety, depression and bipolar disorder, as well as physical ailments including chronic pain, mindfulness can be an effective form of treatment when it is combined with professional support.

Mindfulness is especially important today because of the proliferation digital technology. Since we are always connected and have all our friends and colleagues in the palms of our hands, it is more difficult than ever to simply be present in the moment. As we will examine below, one of the ways to increase mindfulness is to regulate our relationships with mobile devices, email and social media.

### Mindful attitude

To approach something mindfully, there is a certain attitude you need to foster. Here are some elements of a mindful attitude:

- **Non-judgmental** – Try to be impartial and just see things as facts, rather than judging them as good or bad.
- **Acceptance** – Accept things as they are; don't try to change anything.
- **Non-striving** – In mindfulness, try not to be goal oriented and avoid being attached to the outcome.

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- **Curiosity** – Be interested in the experience at hand. What are its sensory qualities? Be a detective and gather as much data about your experience as possible.

### How to practice mindfulness

Mindfulness can fit in to your life in many different ways. As mentioned above, formal practices such as yoga and meditation are great ways to work on mindfulness. These can be sought out by finding a local class with an experienced teacher or by using a podcast, video, or app, of which there are plenty to choose from.

There are also many informal ways you can foster mindfulness, by bringing focused and curious attention to things you already do. Here are some examples of things you do that you could do more mindfully:

- **Mindful walking** – When you go for a walk or walk from one place to another, pay attention to each step and how the rhythm of walking feels in your body. Look at your surroundings and try to notice things you might not otherwise see. Rather than thinking about the place you just left or your destination, focus on the walk itself.
- **Mindful eating** – Often when we eat we are glued to our smart phones, watching TV or locked into a conversation. Choose one meal a day to eat mindfully – breakfast is a good choice for a lot of people. When you eat mindfully, chew slowly and pay attention to the flavours and textures.
- **Mindful breathing** – Take a few moments each day to practice mindful breathing. Focus on each breath, on the sensations in your nose and throat and how the air fills and empties out of your lungs and abdomen.
- **Unplug** – Take time away from your phone and the computer and do something you enjoy and do it mindfully.

Once you have incorporated mindfulness into your own life, you might want to encourage those around you to do things more mindfully as well. Maybe your family can have mindful dinners one night a week or you and your friends can go for regular mindful walks. Maybe you can invent new ways to be mindful — that is what is so incredible about the practice, it can be applied to just about anything!

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