

Downsizing and Decluttering Home Checklist



As you start your downsizing venture, keep this checklist on hand.

Start at least three months ahead. Processing and packing always take longer than you think. Plus, movers often need several weeks' notice to truck your stuff, especially when it's out of state.

“Gift” early. This is a good time to start earmarking special items for your loved ones. Aim to distribute them before you move.

Make a floor plan. Know the layout and size of the new space room by room. That will help you decide what you can fit and where it all goes.

Go room by room. Tackle one room at a time. If the new place doesn't have that room, save it for last and only bring the absolute musts. For example, if you have two bedrooms and the new location only has one, only bring the essentials (bed, dresser, etc.) for one room.

Start small. Tackle practical must-haves first, like kitchen and bathroom supplies. Save the big, emotional stuff (art, heirlooms, photos) for later. You'll need more time to decide what you want to do with these things, but you also may have an easier time deciding once you've gotten into a rhythm with allocating the must-have basics.

Prioritize problem areas. Even though you're starting small, try to get at least one tough job done early, such as the garage, attic, closet, or office. Enlist help for this! If these rooms have lots of keepsakes or heavy items, you'll need help prioritizing, letting go, and lifting.

Sort by keep, toss, and give away – no maybes! Professional organizers call this “processing.” Set up and label containers for what you want to keep, donate (or give to loved ones), and throw away for each room. It's tempting to create a “maybe” pile but try to resist! Or at least keep it to very few items. Eliminating the “maybe” option keeps you on task and helps minimize “analysis paralysis” – spending too much time focused on one thing.

No duplicates. Other than clothing, try to keep just one of each thing. You don't need three whisks. For large-volume things like clothes, set a limit. If you have 20 T-shirts, but you only feel great wearing three, pick your favorite five and move on.

Pro Tip: When in doubt, quiz yourself. Organizing professionals like Peter Walsh and Marie Kondo say if you're having a hard time letting something go, ask yourself: Is it useful? Is it beautiful? Have I used it in the last year? Does it “spark joy?” This is less about organizing and more about pinpointing what you truly value.

Create a labeling system. When you're ready to physically pack, label the boxes by room and contents. That way, you can put the boxes directly in their correlating rooms, and you know what's in each. Once all the boxes in a room are packed, label each one by number and the total box count. This helps you know if something's missing. Here's an example label: “Kitchen – Daily plates and bowls. Box 1 of 10.” Do the numbering step last. Otherwise, if something changes, you'll have to renumber everything.

Digitize it! Memorabilia like photos, letters, and grandkids' artwork take up lots of space. You don't have to throw it all away. Take photos, or hire a company to digitize your favorite pictures and videos onto a small device you can plug in and look at any time.

Pack an “essentials” bag. Whenever you move, you'll need some things at the ready. Prepare a separate bag or container of essentials, so you don't have to hunt through boxes on day one. Your “essentials” bag should include:

- A few outfits
- Pajamas
- Toiletries, medication, and eyeglasses
- Important documents
- Basic kitchen and meal supplies (disposable plates, cups, and utensils; snacks)
- Cleaning supplies (sponge, soap, paper towels)
- Payment for movers (and a small amount of cash just in case)

Tips for Staying Positive as You Downsize



Take time with your treasures. As you declutter, allow enough time to thoughtfully go through your belongings and enjoy the memories associated with these items.

Do a trial run. If you're looking at a senior living facility or 55+ community, many will let you stay for a few days to try it out. Knowing where the amenities and common areas are will help you acclimate faster.

Focus on what you're gaining, not losing. Change is always hard, and there will be tough days. Try to think about how your life will improve with these changes. Think of all the extra time you'll have to enjoy your days and family instead of cleaning, working, or trying to find things.

Enlist help. Even if you hire a professional moving manager, there's a lot of detail in downsizing. You might need help with tasks like reviewing contracts, negotiating rates, site visits, or vetting storage facilities. Even processing your belongings with friends and family can bring a lot of laughter and new memories.

Make plans to see people. If you're moving, set some concrete dates to meet or chat with friends. Familiar faces and staying busy can help speed up the acclimation process.

Join classes and clubs ahead of time. Being part of a group of like-minded people helps stave off loneliness and anxiety. If you've signed a contract, be proactive and enroll in activities you can look forward to.