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Downsizing Tips for Seniors

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As we age, most older adults will consider the option of downsizing or moving to a smaller space. Roughly 51 percent of retirees ages 50 and over move into smaller homes after but many older adults don't want to move. Sixty-four percent of seniors say they plan to stay in their current homes. Whether you choose to stay in your home or move, [housing](#) is an important topic as we age.

Downsizing and decluttering can make life easier and safer, even if you're not moving. It can also be stressful and emotional, especially if you've lived in one place for a while. Whether you're planning to downsize or still undecided, use this guide to make the process smoother. We'll cover tips for preparing to downsize, a decluttering checklist, and ideas for staying sane in what can be a challenging and bittersweet time.



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Why Downsize?

- **Cut costs.** Most retirees are on a limited or fixed income, but there are still incidentals that are hard to predict, like healthcare costs, home repairs, and travel. Reducing your monthly expenses by moving into a smaller, less expensive space saves on mortgage payments, home insurance, and property taxes. It can also mean lower utility and repair bills.
- **Simplify your lifestyle.** The less you have, the less you have to maintain. Your grandkids may love your pool and sprawling lawn, but it's a lot to take care of as you get older.
- **Logistics.** Things like stairs, multiple levels, outdated bathrooms, or long driveways and walkways become more dangerous as we age. Moving to a one-floor space that's easy to access and navigate can [help you age in place longer](#).
- **Family.** You might move later in life to be closer to your children, grandchildren, and other relatives who can help you age in place.

- **Medical needs.** Seniors with chronic conditions or needing more frequent medical care may need to relocate to be near their doctor or [adult day care](#). Or, they might need to move into a space that can accommodate specific medical equipment.
- **Better weather.** One study shows that 25 percent of older adults plan to move to a warmer Just don't forget to pack the sunscreen!

Is it Time to Downsize? Questions to Ask

For older adults, [deciding where and when to move](#) can be complex. But there are some basic questions you can ask yourself to decide if you should relocate.

- Do you have unused rooms?
- Can you afford to stay in your current home for five, 10, or 20 more years?
- Is your yard easy to maintain?
- Do you feel isolated?
- Do you have too much stuff to manage?
- Do you have a lot of equity in your home?

If you realize you have a lot of wasted space or too much clutter, your social interactions are lacking, or the price isn't right, it might be time to downsize.

Preparing to Downsize

You can always chip away at paring down your possessions over time. In fact, we'd recommend it to avoid getting burnt out or overwhelmed. To downsize efficiently for a planned move, though, you need to make some decisions first.

1. **Plan early.** Give yourself enough time to make an organized, informed plan. Some people start the “where will I move?” decision process more than a year in advance. It's also easier to adjust when you've had a while to get used to the idea. Having to rush into a

relocation decision or go through your possessions at the last minute only adds stress.

- 2. Decide where you'll move.** What and how you downsize depends significantly on your new home's location, size, and setup. For example, facilities and [apartments](#) have far less space than a detached house.
- 3. Set goals and a timeline.** When do you want or need to move? If you're going out of state, sometimes trucks need to load a few weeks in advance of your move-in date. Work back from that date, considering the time you need to downsize and pack, as well as time for family if you'll be "gifting" any possessions.

Did You Know: You can hire a [senior move manager](#) to handle all the logistics. The senior-moving business is booming, so make sure you hire a reputable company. Look for certification by the [National Association of Senior and Specialty Move Managers](#).

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 to 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 really 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 an [assisted 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.

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