

The 30-Day Declutter Challenge

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It has perhaps never been easier to accumulate clutter. Even if you’re not trying to acquire new possessions, you can suddenly find your home filled with items you don’t need. Fortunately, it’s also pretty easy to get rid of all that extra stuff; all it takes is a little dedication and a good plan.

If you’ve been feeling distracted, overwhelmed, or simply surrounded by things you don’t like or use, following this **30-day declutter challenge** for a month will help you clear the clutter and put you on the path to maintain a clutter-free life.

This  challenge can be done at any time, whether you start on the first day of the new year or at the start of a new month—or on any day you decide it’s time to make a change.

1. The challenge is designed to start simple, easing you into the habit of decluttering.
2. It then guides you through larger but more satisfying decluttering projects that will instantly improve your daily life.
3. Finally, it prompts you to deal with even the most daunting of spaces, which you’ll now be ready to tackle.

The challenge also is flexible. Because everyone’s lives and homes look different, you can substitute a daily task that doesn’t apply to you with a different one, or switch a task from one day to another to accommodate your schedule.

Let’s get started…

**Day 1: Pens and Pencils**

Start small, by collecting all the pens and pencils in your home. Make sure to look everywhere, as small items like these tend to migrate from room to room. Test pens to determine whether they still work, and discard any that don’t. Sharpen pencils that need sharpening. Then organize them all neatly where you intend for them to “live” permanently: for example, a cupful of pens in your office, another in the kitchen, and a few pens in your bag.

**Day 2: Bags and Pockets**

Clean out all your bags, backpacks, wallets, and luggage. While you’re at it, go through the pockets of your coats. Check every pouch, pocket, and hidden section for gum wrappers, scribbled notes, and receipts. (If you’re lucky, you might find some cash, too.) Throw away any junk, and put other items back in their proper place.

Doing this can jump-start a habit of cleaning the clutter from your bag and coat at the end of each day. Start that now, and you’ll never have to do a major decluttering of them again.

**Day 3: Food**

Go through your refrigerator, freezer, cupboards, [pantry](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/pantry-organization), and any other food storage areas you have. Throw away anything that’s expired or unwanted. (You may also choose to donate unopened, nonperishable foods.) Organize what’s left, so you can see and use what you have.

With food, or any item you shop for and use often, keeping your current stock well-organized—so that you can see everything when you open the fridge or cupboard—will help you avoid buying things you don’t need in the future.

**Day 4: Junk Drawers**

A junk drawer (and this does not technically have to be a drawer; it may be a bedside table, a large bin, a shelf, etc.) is a handy solution to the problem of where to put those necessary odds and ends that don’t have an obvious “home” in your home or apartment. It should not, however, be a receptacle for literal junk, that is, stuff you will never use. Today, sort through your junk areas and separate the useful things from the clutter.

**Day 5: Entryways**

In any home, the spot just inside the door is crucial in terms of preventing clutter. These areas tend to become a dumping ground for jackets, shoes, keys, glasses, bags, mail, and everything else we want to put down the minute we get home.

**The first step** in fixing this problem is to tidy the area, putting everything away where it belongs (for example, coats into the hall closet).

**The second step** is to set up your entryway so that it doesn’t become a clutter hotspot in the future.

In your entryway or any high-traffic area, cut down on clutter by giving specific items a dedicated home, for example, a hook or dish for your keys. Also remove anything that encourages the collection of clutter; no one will ever sit on that decorative chair by the door, but it will practically beg people to pile coats on top of it.

**Day 6: Unwanted Clothes**

Hopefully, those first five days went well and you’re feeling ready to take your decluttering to the next level. For the next five days, the challenge will [focus on your wardrobe](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/one-weekend-to-cleaner-closets). We’re giving that area extra attention because (a) most people buy a lot of clothes and find it difficult to part with them, and (b) clearing out your wardrobe can be one of the most satisfying decluttering projects. When done thoroughly, it can help you move on to decluttering the rest of your home. If you don’t need the full five days for this, take some time off or concentrate on another cluttered area that needs extra work.

**If you’re feeling a bit overwhelmed at this stage, here are eight reasons to**[**declutter your life**](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/how-to-get-organized/)**and take back control of your home.**

On this first wardrobe day, do a quick sweep of your clothes, shoes, and accessories and gather together any obvious candidates for donation or the trash. Don’t stress about doing a major closet overhaul today; just grab low-hanging fruit, like items that are damaged beyond repair, do not fit, or haven’t been your style in 10 years.

**Day 7: Closet, Part 1**

Today, evaluate everything in your closet and decide what you want to keep. If you have a large wardrobe, split this task between today and tomorrow, using today to focus on the clothes you wear for work, on weekends, on evenings out, and on dressy occasions. If you store your off-season clothes elsewhere, you can either include them in this declutter, or plan to do another round of closet cleaning when the seasons change. The [most efficient way to declutter a closet](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/10-steps-organizing-wardrobe) is to take every item out, try everything on, and put back only those things you truly like, that fit you well, that work with your lifestyle, and that you know you will wear.

**Off-Season Pieces**

A good way to minimize closet clutter long-term is to pack up your off-season pieces and store them elsewhere, like in the back of the closet or under the bed.

This way, you won’t be distracted by clothes that are temporarily unwearable, so you’ll have a much better understanding of exactly what you own. Though it may seem confusing, the method of storing off-season clothing (and other seasonal items, like holiday decorations) out of view has the same effect as clearly displaying frequently used items like food and makeup. In both cases, you’re minimizing possible distractions and organizing your belongings so you can see exactly what you’re working with, removing any confusion about how much you already have, and preventing the purchase of duplicates.

**Day 8: Closet, Part 2**

Today, continue with the rest of your clothing, concentrating on workout clothes, sleep- and lounge-wear, undergarments, socks, and anything else you didn’t cover yesterday. When you’re done, you should have a pared down wardrobe and two or three piles of clothes you don’t want.

**Tip:**When cleaning out your wardrobe, sort the pieces you don’t want into three piles: one for trash, one for donation and/or sale, and (if applicable) one for tailoring or repair.

**Day 9: Outerwear**

Today, continue to clear out your wardrobe by sorting through your coats, jackets, vests, and other outerwear.

When clearing out your closet, you may notice wardrobe gaps that you want or need to fill (maybe you have a light jacket and a heavy-duty parka, but nothing appropriate for the in-between weather). Take the time to write those needs down, so that in the future you can shop with a purpose. This works well to prevent buying whatever strikes you in the moment, thus collecting more clothes that will go unworn, cluttering up your closet once more.

**Day 10: Accessories**

Finally, take care of the little items like shoes, boots, bags, hats, gloves, scarves, jewelry, belts, etc. In addition to removing items you no longer want or need, think about how you organize these small pieces and how you can improve your setup to prevent your accessories from getting cluttered again. While decluttering, you may come across broken or otherwise unusable accessories that you’ve been meaning to take to the jeweler or cobbler.

Be very honest with yourself here; if you really wanted to wear these things, would you have had them repaired by now? Did you simply forget or been busy, schedule a specific time into your calendar to take these items to be fixed. Have you been hanging on to them for vague, aspirational reasons (think satin stilettos that you’ve never worn, but kept in the closet for ten years just in case you’re invited to a fabulous party) this might be the time to let them go.

**Day 11: Paper**

For the next five days, we’ll focus on [decluttering paper items](https://extramile.thehartford.com/technology/tips-paperless) that tend to pile up, if you’re not paying very close attention. Stacks of magazines, newspapers, catalogs, and other incoming mail can be difficult to declutter. (If the thought of finally getting rid of this stuff doesn’t motivate you, consider that excess paper can also be a fire hazard.) It’s just so easy to convince yourself that you really will read them all…someday. Take this day to sort through all those stacks of reading material and mail. Rescue anything important, and deal with it, then recycle the rest.

**Day 12: Books**

Even if you take pride in your book collection, you probably own *at least* a few volumes you’ll never, ever read again. Sort through all your books (including those that have escaped from your bookshelves and are scattered around your home) and donate the ones you no longer want.

**Day 13: Office Supplies**

Whether or not you have a home office, it’s likely that you’ve accumulated a bunch of notebooks, labels, envelopes, stamps, paper clips, staples, etc. in your home. Round them up today and organize them, getting rid of anything you no longer need. While you’re doing this, check up on those pens from Day 1, and reorganize them if they’ve gotten out of control.

**Tip:**Tasks like this are a good reminder that decluttering is a daily habit. When you return lost pens, or any household items, to their home every time you come across them, you won’t have to do regular major cleanups just to keep your place looking neat. Additionally, you won’t keep buying more pens because you can’t find the ones you already own.

**Day 14: Filing**

There’s no use pretending this one is fun, but it’s necessary, and it will make your life so much easier when you need to find your car title or the name of that doctor you went to in 2005. Go through your filing cabinet (or whatever you use as a system for storing paperwork) and organize everything—recycling or shredding papers you no longer need. It’s worth the effort to shred any materials that contain personally identifiable information, such as bank statements, bills, and credit card offers.

**You’re doing a great job. Keep going!**

**Day 15: Tech/Electronics**

If you have a cache of old laptops, cords, cables, plugs, chargers, memory cards, and so on, gather them all in one room and go through them. Also grab small appliances that may no longer work, like lamps or clock radios. Research how to responsibly [get rid of tech equipment](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/tech-decluttering/) that you don’t or can’t use, and organize the rest so that the next time you need a spare pair of earbuds or a phone charger, you’ll know where to find it—and that it works.

**Day 16: Bedroom**

You’re already halfway through your 30-day declutter challenge! The next seven days will address the main rooms or areas in your home, starting with your bedroom. Most people want their bedroom to be a calm space, conducive to sleep and relaxation. To achieve this, get rid of superfluous furniture and decorative items in your bedroom, and return items that belong in other rooms to their homes. Put away anything like clean clothes or extra blankets piled on the bed that might be cluttering up the space.

**A Bit of Advice:** If you share a bedroom, don’t move or discard someone else’s belongings without asking. Hopefully, this challenge can be done by all members of your household but, if not, concentrate only on spaces and things that are yours alone. This goes not just for bedrooms, but any shared areas or belongings in your home. Everyone has their own definition of what is and isn’t clutter, so focus on your own clearly defined clutter first.

**Day 17: Bathroom**

Many products stored or used in the bathroom have relatively short shelf lives, so check expiration dates and make sure your makeup, skincare, and medicines are still good. Also check that you’re not holding on to any empty bottles of soap, shampoo, or cleaning supplies. If you have shelving units, shower caddies, or similar storage containers in your bathroom, consider whether they make the space easier to use or just add to the clutter.

Storage containers can help you corral small items or manage a difficult space (such as a bathroom with no built-in shelves or cabinets). But, more often, we buy these containers without fully considering whether they’re needed, and they soon become clutter themselves. When in doubt, don’t buy storage containers unless you know exactly how and where you’ll use them.

**Day 18: Linen Closet**

Linen closets, or wherever you store those extra towels, sheets, pillowcases, and blankets, can easily become overstuffed and disorganized. Today, sort through your linens and remove anything that you don’t use. Unless you really keep on top of it, your linen closet can become a black hole of unused, yet useful, items. If you find you’re creating extra space in your linen closet, you may choose to store seasonal linens or decorations there, as well.

**Day 19: Storage Area of Your Choice**

On this day, clear out any indoor storage area that hasn’t been covered yet. This could be a hall closet, a bedroom closet that wasn’t covered in your wardrobe clear-out, a chest, or the space under the bed.

During this seven-day room-clearing section of the challenge, leave the attic, basement, garage, and outdoors alone for now, as you’ll get to them later—unless, of course, you have some extra time and really feel like tackling them.

**In general, if you’re ever motivated to declutter something, go with it!**

**Day 20: Kitchen**

Today, [clear your kitchen of any unused or unwanted items](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/unnecessary-kitchen-tools) such as cookware, dishes, cutlery, glassware, mugs, utensils, and so on. Don’t forget to assess gadgets and small appliances, like potato peelers or blenders, and be honest with yourself about whether you really use them. Especially be on the lookout for duplicates of items that may be taking up your kitchen storage space. To prevent future kitchen clutter, organize those items you do use regularly so that everything is easily accessible.

**Day 21: Dining Room**

Dining room clutter is usually made up of items that drift in from other rooms. Today, grab anything that doesn’t belong here and return shoes to the closet, mugs to the kitchen, etc. You may also have too much dining room furniture, especially if you [downsized from a larger space](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/declutter-when-downsizing-home/) or have fewer people living with you and visiting than in the past. If you have 10 chairs and never host more than four people, those extra chairs may now be functioning as clutter, and you might be better off without them.

If your home or apartment doesn’t have a separate living room and dining room, you can either adapt Days 21 and 22 to cover other rooms, or split your space into sections. In a one-bedroom apartment, for example, your “dining room” can be the area where you eat (even if it’s just a table) and your “living room” may contain a couch, coffee table, and TV stand.

**Day 22: Living Room**

Much like the dining room, the living room can collect things that people bring from elsewhere and forget to put away. Scan the room for this type of clutter, being careful not to miss out-of-place items that have been lying around so long that you don’t normally notice them. Depending on how often you actually use your living room, you may find a variety of rarely used items cluttering up the space.

**Day 23: Your Personal Clutter Hotspot**

This day is another wild card to allow for the quirks of your space and your life. Many homes have a tricky no man’s land where clutter builds up, like the stairs or a little corner nook; you may also have a room not covered in this challenge, like a laundry room or sunroom. Alternately, you can take this day to deal with a clutter hotspot outside your home, like your desk at work, or to revisit any of the prior topics that didn’t get fully addressed in one day.

**Day 24: Attic and Basement**

You might think the expression “out of sight, out of mind” would apply to clutter—after all, it’s easy enough to shove any objects we don’t want to make decisions about into one of these spacious storage areas. But just being aware that there’s a mess of stuff hiding above or below can be a subtle source of stress. Venture downstairs or upstairs today and sort through those items you’ve stashed away. You may find many things that were difficult to part with at the time, but that you’re now happy to get rid of.  Precious memories may fall into this category, if so, here are more tips on how to [declutter sentimental items](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/declutter-sentimental-items/).

**Day 25: Car**

Most of us spend so much time in our cars that, if we’re not vigilant, they can end up filled with junk, like empty coffee cups, and misplaced items, like scarves or books. The good news is, it doesn’t take too long to clean out your vehicle, so do that today.

If you don’t have a vehicle or any outdoor storage areas, consider taking this day and Day 26 to start planning a [yard sale](https://extramile.thehartford.com/home/perfect-yard-sale) to get rid of the items that didn’t make the cut in this challenge.

**Day 26: Outdoor Areas**

If you have a garage, shed, porch, steps, or any other outdoor area that’s a magnet for clutter, take this day to sort through everything that’s out there. If you’ve recently moved or downsized, you may have donated or gotten rid of a lot of the items that tend to live in these spaces, but, if you haven’t, clearing cluttered outdoor areas can be a real game-changer. Organize the things you use, and get rid of the things you don’t.

**Day 27: Pet and Plant Supplies**

With pets and plants come toys, food containers, tools, gloves, and other necessary (and not so necessary) accessories. If you haven’t already dealt with these things on another day, figure out which stuffed toys or terracotta pots you still want, throw out anything that can’t be used, and pass the rest on to another pet- or plant-lover.

**Day 28: DIY and Emergency Supplies**

You may have encountered some of these in your junk drawer or elsewhere, but today is the day to round up and sort out all the little things you reach for when something needs fixing: batteries, light bulbs, tools, user manuals, tape, screws, hooks, buttons, scissors, needles, thread, and other assorted household bits. Also check out your [emergency supplies](https://www.thehartford.com/claims/emergency-preparedness-checklist) like flashlights, candles, and matches. Your goal is to organize everything so that it’s readily accessible when you need it, and, of course, to discard anything that’s broken, expired or that you’ll never use.

**Day 29: Hobby Equipment and Collections**

You may not want to get rid of any of your art supplies, exercise equipment, DVDs, or souvenir refrigerator magnets. But you should go through it all anyway, because—despite your best intentions—collectibles and hobby equipment and supplies can quickly become unmanageable clutter. You may discover that you don’t really use every item you own, or that you’re holding on to some things that no longer make you happy. If so, consider gifting these items to family or friends or donating them to someone who will use and enjoy them. Even if you keep it all, simply reorganizing these items can seriously clear up space in your home, making it easier for you to practice your hobby or appreciate the objects you’ve collected.

**Day 30: Email**

Email might not seem like something you need to declutter—after all, it doesn’t take up physical space. But repeatedly opening an inbox full of messages you haven’t read or acted on can really drain your energy, making you less productive. Delete what you don’t need, flag what you have to take care of, and save messages you want to preserve to the appropriate folder. (If you don’t have separate folders, create some now.) There are also [tools to maximize your email enjoyment and productivity](https://extramile.thehartford.com/technology/email-management/). You can also choose to expand this virtual decluttering to your contacts list, digital photos, documents, music, social media, or anything online that makes you feel overwhelmed.

This last day also can serve as inspiration to declutter your physical environment further, or to move on to the next level of decluttering and revamp your schedule, the activities you participate in, and the people you choose to make time for. Once you start the decluttering process, it will become easier to manage the daily inflow of stuff—helping prevent the accumulation of new clutter and making your life run more smoothly overall.

And now, 30 days later, you’re done! Or, even if you’re not done, you’ve made a *tremendous*start. If you’re living in a home where you’ve stayed for more than 20 years, you may find that this 30-day declutter challenge equals round one, rather than the end game. Take a break if you need to, and then pick a new month and begin again.