

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

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.

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.

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- **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.