



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA  
EXTENSION

# Household Clutter Control

**Pamela R. Turner**, Professor and Extension Housing & Indoor Environment Specialist

**Charles Okpala**, Richmond County FACS Extension Agent

**Von Baker**, Muscogee County Coordinator/FACS Agent

**Laura T. Smith**, Telfair County Coordinator /FACS Agent

**Sylvia Davis**, Baker County Coordinator/FACS Agent and Mitchell County FACS Agent

**Olivia Handley**, Coweta County FACS Agent

**Michelle Quick**, Glynn County Coordinator/FACS Agent

**Janette Burkes**, Grady County FACS Agent

**Kimberly Howell**, Richmond County FACS Agent

**Diane W Bales**, Professor, Extension Human Development Specialist, and Child Life Program Director

## **Do You Have a Problem With Clutter?**

If you think you have a problem with clutter, please consider the following questions:

- Are you unable to move freely around and in your home?
- Are tables, counters, and drawers overflowing with various items?
- Are your closets full of clothes and shoes that you no longer wear?
- Do you lose things and have to search for them several times a week?
- Are you struggling with space to park your vehicle in your garage?
- Are dirty dishes and empty drink cans left out for more than 24 hr?
- Do you hesitate to invite people to your home because of clutter?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it appears that you could have a clutter issue. Be encouraged to read on for steps you can take to reduce clutter in your home.

## **What is Clutter?**

To manage clutter, it is important to understand clutter. Clutter is a collection of things lying around making an untidy mess in your home.

There may not be a specific place for the items. Clutter can accumulate anywhere—from one flat surface, like a table, to a room, and in severe cases, your entire home. Clutter includes mail, papers, magazines, books, toys, hobby materials, shoes, clothing, tools, and cleaning supplies.

## **Why Should Clutter Concern You?**

Household clutter can impact physical and mental health as well as quality of life. Most people spend 90% of their time indoors, most of which is spent inside their home. Essentially, our home should be a safe space, not only to start and end the day, but also to spend quality time with family and friends.

Research reveals that a clean house can positively affect our physical and mental health. By cutting down on “stuff,” we make our home welcoming to the people dear to us and improve the indoor environment. Excessive clutter can lead to many health concerns, including:

- Falls and injuries may occur when a person cannot reach things or has to maneuver around piles of stuff. This can be a major problem for older adults and people with limited mobility.
- Pet hair, dust, pollen, and mold spores that accumulate on piles of clutter can trigger asthma and other respiratory concerns.
- Stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health concerns can be worsened by excess clutter.

# Take Charge and Clear Your Clutter

Start by assembling a simple clutter reduction kit (see callout box). As you clear clutter, you will need to clean the newly exposed surfaces. Begin with small projects by setting a timer for 20 min. Focus on cleaning off a table, clearing a countertop, or cleaning out a drawer, with a timely goal of organizing one room.

## CLUTTER REDUCTION KIT

- large trash bags
- broom and dustpan
- vacuum cleaner
- mop
- multipurpose and glass cleaners
- rags and paper towels
- storage containers & boxes
- marker and labels

In general, people use less than half of the items in their homes. This means the remaining half could be potential clutter. Take a good look at your items and be honest about what you really use.

Only keep things that you need and will use, or items with a strong personal meaning to you. Don't confuse things with memories. Our memories will be with us long after the "stuff" is gone. Sort items into the five categories below.

### 1. Keep

Sort similar items together, so they will be easier to put away. Create organized centers for things like cleaning products, office supplies, dishes, makeup, tools, etc. The keep pile may be divided into:

- things to keep and put away now
- things that are broken and can be repaired within 2 months

### 2. Give Away

Organize items that you will give to friends, donate to charity, or give away through social media groups.

### 3. Trash or Recycle

Put items that need to be thrown away into trash bags or recycling containers.

### 4. Sell

Gently used items may be sold at yard sales or consignment stores, or using websites and apps.

### 5. Uncertain

Limit what you place in this box. If an item in the box hasn't been used in 6 months, it should be sold, thrown out, or given away.

Make your decluttering effort enjoyable! Play music or listen to podcasts while you are sorting. For motivation, take photos of your progress.

## Maintaining a Clutter Balance

To keep your home clutter-free, everyone living in your home needs to understand that they have to pick up after themselves. Doing a little cleaning and straightening every day can save you the hassle of going through the whole process again.

Use the **60-second rule**: If it takes no longer than 60 seconds to put something away, then go ahead and put it away instead of laying it down “for the time being.”

Make a chore chart and assign age-appropriate jobs for everyone in the house, so that everyone contributes. Remember, it takes 2 weeks for a new chore to become a routine. Follow the **one-in, one-out** rule: Every time you bring an item into your home, take one item out.

Take the first step to manage clutter in your home. For more information about decluttering your home, visit [healthyhomes.uga.edu](https://healthyhomes.uga.edu).

*The original 2012 manuscript was written by Susan L. Moore, Denise Dixon Everson, and Pamela R. Turner. Revised in 2025 by Pamela R. Turner.*

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