

STAYWELL

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Brian Coles, Health Analyst

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Healthy and Clutter

In 2017, Lenny Vartarian did a study that demonstrated people eat more unhealthy foods if the environment they are in is chaotic. Many studies illustrate that individuals who live or work in messy, cluttered, or disorganized environments:

- Eat more cookies and snacks.
- Have higher levels of stress.
- Struggle interpreting others reactions or perceptions. A person may think another individual is irritable or negative, when in reality the individual is not.
- Have a decline in mental health.
- Struggle with thought processes (i.e., the mind is too cluttered, so an individual may have greater difficulty processing information).

Strong evidence supports that mental clutter is a major contributor of age-related memory loss.

A study published in the *Huffington Post* revealed that how a home is organized is a predictor of stress. From those people surveyed, 87 percent have serious anxiety over maintaining their home.

Another study conducted by the University of New Mexico revealed that living in a cluttered, home creates a feeling of hostility towards the home. The place that should be a safe haven is perceived as a threatening environment where peace and rest no longer remain.

So how does disorganization and clutter affect our mental status?

- The mind tends to become overwhelmed with the clutter sending the brain into hyperdrive. This leads to sensory overload. An individual may become more sensitive and frustrated. For example, when a person is trying to work on something that requires concentration, and there are young kids in the background laughing, screaming, and playing, that person may become depressed or feel down. This creates confusion and frustration.
- When the mind is in constant overload, a sense of accomplishment shuts down. A person becomes unsettled and feels like he/she is always behind. Basically, a person gets circuit board overload and the mind cannot find a peaceful and calming state. This can lead to guilt. Shift workers often suffer from "brain clutter" because their schedules are so chaotic.
- Have you ever had someone try to talk to you when you are distracted? You hardly hear a word they say. Having constant clutter has the same impact. An individual may act and feel distracted and make more mistakes, forget more, and fail to encode information into the brain properly. Have you ever remodeled and moved things around



and can't find them? Frustration, resentment, and other emotions become chronic when things are in a state of disorder.

- Just as it becomes harder to locate items when things are messy, the brain struggles in the same manner. Having to sort through the brain clutter makes information retrieval slower and less efficient. People tend to suffer brain fog more.

This can go too far the other way as well. People become so organized and decluttered that they struggle to cope with the least bit of clutter in their life. These individuals have all the same problems as someone who lives in complete disorganization and need to learn to relax and change their focus. Because the individual is task-driven, he/she may need to learn to schedule downtime to relax and focus on other things.



In general, stress can lead to the fight-or-flight response causing chemicals to react in the body. If the response is not needed, these chemicals can have negative consequences on health. The immune system suffers and people are more prone to sickness and weight gain. Unknown illnesses arise. When a person is seen by a physician, all tests are normal, but symptoms are present. This leads to greater frustration. Often many hours are spent researching medical conditions because something is wrong, but no one will listen. The reality is the body is in a chaotic state and acts ill, but is not. Stress impacts people in many different ways. There is not a one-time simple fix or diagnosis because diet and lifestyle impact health.

To help IPSC employees and their families declutter their minds and improve their health, the Chill Pill/Declutter initiative is back this year.

- ✓ It is open to employees and spouses.
- ✓ You may earn a gift card upon completion.
- ✓ There is no start date or completion date. Take the time you need to complete the program.
- ✓ The program will be offered in multiple quarters as well.
- ✓ Take a pre-mind clutter/stress test. Take the test again after completing the program to notice the change.
- ✓ Details will be available online or outside Brian's office.

Sources

1. <http://www.sheknows.com/health-and-wellness/articles/1017199/what-clutter-is-doing-to-your-health>
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3. <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/mind/articles/2016-11-08/why-decluttering-is-good-for-your-health>
4. <https://www.webmd.com/balance/features/clutter-control?print=true>
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