

OP-ED: Spring into a happier, healthier life

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March 20 marks the first day of spring. This means saying goodbye to frosted lawns and afternoon sunsets and hello to blooming flowers and chirping birds. For many, spring is when we clean out the clutter that's accumulated over the cold, long winter months. While this can involve a weekend of chasing dust bunnies, clearing out cobwebs and washing windows, there are several other ways we can think about spring cleaning our lives that can help us be happier and healthier all year long. And not one involves lifting a broom.

This spring, you owe it to yourself to clear out the psychological clutter, sharpen your focus, and lighten up your life. Experts say the key to a calmer existence is tackling

tasks little by little. When you begin to let go of big picture stress, fear or anxiety, you have less weighing down your mind, and your daily responsibilities seem far less daunting.

Below are a few bite-size tips to help you get rid of lifestyle clutter.

Quiet your mind

Carve out a few minutes every day to still your mind and just breathe. When your brain is constantly processing information, you don't give it the opportunity to recharge and reflect. Meditating, or decluttering the mind, is proven to improve concentration and memory. By taking even just a few minutes a day to temporarily quiet your mind, you'll take on the remainder of your day with a clearer, focused outlook.

Take a Digital detox

A cluttered digital world, just like a cluttered natural world, can lead to a life of stress and anxiety. An overload of online accounts and unread messages can overwhelm even the best multitaskers. To prevent feeling buried or pulled in too many directions at once, set aside time each day to fully unplug: turn off your screens during family time or dedicate the hour before you go to sleep to a conversation with your spouse or to finishing a chapter in a book. Just a small amount of "off" time can truly reduce the noise in your life and help you focus.

Clean up your relationships

Quality means much more than quantity when it comes to relationships, and it's important to identify who in your life makes you happy and who does not. Many of us hold on to friendships and romantic relationships long after they've run their course. So if you have connections that aren't adding joy to your life and making you feel good about yourself, it may be time to let them go. All relationships suffer through rough patches, but take action and make a change if you've found that yours has been bringing you down for a long period of time. It's not always easy, but it'll be worth it in the long run.

We are here if you need support in spring cleaning your life. Are you or someone you know struggling with stress or anxiety? Centerstone is here to help. Contact us any time at 800-344-8802.

About Centerstone

Centerstone, a not-for-profit organization, serves more than 14,000 Illinois residents every year through mental health, substance abuse, prevention, and integrated health services. For more than 50 years Centerstone has served adults, children and seniors through service centers across nine Illinois counties. approximately 25,000 children, adolescents, adults and seniors each year. It is accredited by CARF International. For more information about Centerstone, please call 800-344-8802 or visit www.centerstone.org.