

Get Organized for Better Health

RESOLVED TO BE ACTIVE, EAT SMART, OR TACKLE STRESS? THESE SMALL CHANGES TO YOUR PERSONAL SPACE WILL GET THINGS ROLLING.

By Leslie Goldman

Doctors and professional organizers may seem like strange bedfellows, but with research linking our environment and our health, how we arrange our homes can be the difference between whether we gain or lose weight, rock or skip a workout, and leave work happy or stressed.

“You need to strategically organize in a way that makes it easier to achieve your goals,” says psychologist and former personal trainer Susan Rudnicki, PhD, of Dunwoody, Georgia. So if the chips are blocking the whole grains in your ultratidy pantry, you’re only halfway there. We got advice from health experts and organizing pros to help you hit all your wellness goals this year.



Fitness Gear

HANG A WORKOUT-CLOTHES STATION IN YOUR CLOSET.

Organizing blogger Katie Maris Pyle of Olympia, Washington, fills each slot in a fabric hanging shoe organizer with a complete workout outfit—shirt, shorts, sports bra, and socks. Nearby: a bin filled with the hair ties, sunglasses, earbuds, pepper spray, and spare house key she takes on her runs. “I used to wake up intending to exercise, but when I couldn’t find clean clothes, I never made it out,” she says. “Now I have no excuses.”

BE PREPARED. Keep sneakers and spare workout clothes in the trunk of your car (or your go-everywhere tote) to take advantage of spur-of-the-moment fitness opportunities. “This way, if an appointment cancels or you’re driving by a beautiful park and have some time, you can squeeze in a workout,” says Rudnicki.

SET UP A SYSTEM FOR DEALING WITH GYM CLOTHES.

Keep your gym bag in the laundry room, suggests Leslie Josel, owner of Order Out of Chaos, an organizing company in Westchester, New York. As soon as you return from the gym, toss your sweaty clothes directly into the washing machine—and once they’re clean and dry, put them back in the bag. “If something takes a lot of steps, you’re less likely to do it,” she says. “With your bag already packed, that’s one less step to get yourself out the door.” (Plus, you’ll thwart mold spores, which can begin multiplying in damp gear in just 24 hours.)

INVEST IN GEAR YOU LOVE.

When it comes to fitness success, clothes truly do make the woman. In one business school study, subjects who donned white doctor's coats performed better on attention-related tasks than subjects who didn't wear the coats. When subjects were told the same coat was a painter's uniform, performance did not improve. This powerful effect on performance, called "enclothed cognition," is the reason you naturally assume the best-dressed woman in your yoga class knows what she's doing. "If you feel confident and athletic, you'll want to work harder," says Rudnicki. The clothes needn't be expensive or trendy; they just need to make you feel good.

STOCK YOUR OTTOMAN.

You already love ottomans for their ability to pull double duty; what about stashing your home workout gear inside? With dumbbells, resistance bands, and a jump rope hidden there, all you need to do is grab your gear, push the ottoman aside, and turn on your favorite at-home workout video.

ROLL THE RIGHT WAY. Illness can upend a workout groove. Make it to every class by rolling your yoga mat to minimize contact with the foot fungus, wart virus, and other germs that can live on studio floors. Rolling your mat from one end to the other puts whatever was on the floor underneath you in contact with the top of the mat and you, says Sophie Uliano, a certified yoga instructor in Los Angeles. Instead, stand near your unrolled mat, grab the edge closest to you, and fold it in half, toward the top. Next, grab the fold and roll it forward so the top stays clean and protected. Stash it inside a sling until your next class.



In the Kitchen

PUT GOOD-FOR-YOU FOOD ON

DISPLAY. Berries, cucumbers, and other produce get easily buried (or smooshed) in your refrigerator's deep drawer. "When you open it, you only see what's on top, in front, or at eye level," says Maureen Guzman, owner of Katy Home Organizer in Katy, Texas. "And people don't eat what they can't see." She recommends using clear plastic bins on fridge shelves to store smaller and more delicate produce; stash bulky produce or even loaves of bread in the deep drawer. And pull some of that fruit out of the fridge: A Cornell study found that women with a visible fruit bowl on the counter weighed about 13 pounds less than those without.

UPDATE YOUR SPICE CABINET.

Most American adults fall short of the approximate recommended 2 to 3½ cups of vegetables a day. Spices and herbs—think curry, ginger, garlic, and rosemary—can make veggies taste more appeal-

ing while reducing the need for sodium and fat when they're cooked. To keep spices top of mind (and at peak flavor), Nonnahs Driskill, founding organizer of Get Organized Already in Pasadena, California, recommends tossing old and expired seasonings, buying new, bagged spices and herbs (they're cheaper than bottled ones), and decanting them into clean, labeled jars or containers.

CLEAR THE COUNTERTOPS.

A cluttered kitchen can bring on the munchies: A study published in *Environment and Behavior* found that women in a messy kitchen ate twice as many cookies as women in the same kitchen when it was organized and quiet. Being in a chaotic space makes you think, "I can't keep anything straight; why should I even try?" notes Rudnicki. Set a timer for 25 minutes—the ideal time for maximizing focus and efficiency—and start cleaning. Not only might it limit stress eating, but a study out of Indiana University found that people with clean houses are more active than those with messy ones, probably because all that scrubbing and sweeping counts as physical exercise.

Little tweaks can pay off big. Try one or all of our "15 Small Changes for a Leaner, Healthier You" at realsimple.com/smallchanges.

REORGANIZE YOUR CABINETS.

Make it easier to eat nutritious foods by reserving the easy-to-reach middle shelves for beans, canned veggies, oatmeal, and nuts. Then put "sometimes" foods on a high shelf or in a seldom-used pantry, suggests Driskill. Likewise, keep the spiralizer, blender, vegetable steamer, and sparkling water maker front and center; push the ice cream maker and deep fryer to the back of the cupboard.

HANG AN ANALOG CLOCK.

Does getting everyone out the door in the morning leave you frenzied, with no time to eat breakfast? An old-fashioned clock can jumpstart the day you deserve. "Digital clocks only tell you one time—the present," explains Josel. "An analog clock makes you more time-aware; the sweep of the hands shows how much time has elapsed and how much you have left." Not only will you leave the house less anxious, but better time management might grant you the extra minutes you need for breakfast, which studies have linked with a reduced risk of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity.



LOULOUVONG/GETTY IMAGES

FROM TOP: TOMAPA/GETTY IMAGES; INGEMAR LINDEWALL/GETTY IMAGES



At the Office

MOVE YOUR DESK. We tend to position our desks near a window, for both natural light and the chance to tap nature as our muse. But light streaming in from behind the computer screen can lead to eye fatigue. And if your back is facing the window, sunlight can wash out images on the screen, making you squint. Reorient your space so windows run alongside the desk and computer screen.

ROTATE VISUAL INSPIRATION.

In a survey of LinkedIn professionals conducted by the photo-art company CanvasPop, 77 percent said art in their work space made them feel happier, 74 percent said it made them feel more inspired, and 37 percent said it made them feel more relaxed. That framed Frida Kahlo photo or "Today is tomorrow's yesterday" quote can totally pump you up—until it doesn't. "If you keep the same ones up too long, they lose their spice and turn into white noise," says Driskill. Rotate in new artwork or sayings every few weeks to engage your brain and stay motivated.

ORGANIZE BY TIME FRAME.

Clutter overwhelms the visual cortex, the area of the brain that processes visual information. A messy desk, then, means your brain has to work harder just to accomplish the same tasks. Josel recommends dividing your desk elements into past, present, and future. The past is anything you don't regularly use (old but important papers, for instance); move those items to a file cabinet or storage box. Prime desk real estate goes to the present—things you need now, like your computer, pens, journals, paper. Direct future gear (extra supplies, stationery) to a nearby shelf or bookcase.

A reassuring caveat: Achieving a totally clear desk isn't just difficult; it may be counterproductive. "We need a certain amount of clutter to operate normally," says Princeton University neuroscientist Sabine Kastner, MD, PhD. "A completely sterile desk area is depressing—the brain needs some stimulation to be productive."