



The Art of Enough: 5 Tips for Decluttering

— Experience Life —

Do you sometimes snack
mindlessly on mediocre food?
Buy clothes that don't really fit?
Binge-watch TV shows when you
really need sleep?

You're not alone. Our culture has become almost fanatically centered on consumption of all types, and it's affecting our health, happiness, and well-being.

"The average person now consumes twice as much as 50 years ago," notes Annie Leonard, whose 2007 documentary, *The Story of Stuff*, tracked the cycle of commodities from production to disposal.

"At a basic level, we're all just looking to be happy," adds Michelle Gielan, author of *Broadcasting Happiness: The Science of Igniting and Sustaining Positive Change*. "But at a certain point, many people start to notice that any pleasure from what they consume just doesn't last. That's because it doesn't enrich us in ways that really count."

It doesn't have to be this way. Breaking the cycle of overconsumption is not always easy, but it's entirely possible — and it gets easier as you go along. Here are five strategies that can help you reduce, reuse, and rejoice!



1. Focus on what you need — and what brings you joy.

The more we accumulate, says Joshua Becker, author of *The More of Less: Finding the Life You Want Under Everything You Own*, the more mental energy we expend to take care of it. When you begin to accept that what you have is enough and start to let go of some of that consumption — including shopping, social media, overeating, anything that involves “input” mode — it can be exhilarating.

“People think it’s a sacrifice to consume less,” Becker adds, “when actually it feels like freedom.”

Try This:

Open a stuffed junk drawer and notice how it makes you feel. Now, open a nearly empty drawer. Without judgment, feel the difference between the two.

Pick one item in your home at random. Ask yourself, *Does this bring me joy? Does this serve a purpose? Or even, Do I really need this?* If not, consider donating or recycling it. Repeat the technique for two objects tomorrow, three the next day, and so on.



2. Let go mindfully.

People often assume that scaling back their possessions means chucking everything but a backpack and some underwear. But it's really about understanding what each item you own means to you, says Ryan Nicodemus, cocreator of *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things* and TheMinimalists.com.

When Nicodemus decided to downsize his belongings, he and a friend packed up his entire apartment. During the following days, he unpacked only what he needed. After three weeks, about 80 percent of his stuff was still boxed up. So he pulled out a few seasonal items, like his winter coat, and a few extra dishes, then donated the rest.

Make your scale-down efforts into a game, Nicodemus suggests. He cites a campaign called [Project 333](http://Project333.com), which challenges people to dress with 33 or fewer items for three months. "Doing something like that gets you into the mindset of using less," he says. "Plus, it's just a fun challenge."

Try This:

Pack all of one kind of clothing item in a box — sweaters, shoes, etc. — and for the next month, take out only what you need. After 30 days, consider donating what's left over.

Put a week's worth of clothes in a suitcase, as if you're going on a trip. Then wear only what you've packed for those seven days. See how it feels to work with a smaller wardrobe.





3. Keep it simple.

Nicodemus decided to change his consumption patterns because he wanted more control over his life while working 80-hour weeks at his six-figure corporate job. Over two years, he focused on buying less, spending less, cutting his bills, and paying off his debt.

Then, without notice, he lost his job. It wasn't an issue. Nicodemus had become so adept at living cheaply that he knew he could cover his necessities and still have a future filled with possibilities.

Try This:

After your next grocery trip, see how long you can go without buying food again. You'll be surprised how creative you can be with leftovers and what's in your refrigerator.

Make nonspending into a game. How many days can you go without buying clothes, nonessential trinkets, or little "rewards" for yourself? When you do buy something, start over the next day and see if you can beat your record.

4. Go for quality.

Paying more for a well-made item means you can use it for years — sometimes decades. You'll be able to shop less often and replace fewer goods, keeping more out of the waste stream.

And not all quality goods are expensive. "My table is made from an old door that I found, and it will never leave my house, because I love it," says sustainability expert Robert Shapiro. "That's really the key: Own only what you absolutely love and what you want to live with for a long time."

Also, think of your possessions as a collection with a certain, stable size, Shapiro adds. So when you get something new, something else gets donated or recycled.

"We are taught to want what's new, but when you begin to deprogram yourself from that, some amazing things can happen," he says. "You start to feel satisfied with what you have, and you bring in only what you really love. When you extend that to all aspects of your life, it feels liberating."

Try This:

Before you walk into a store, make a list, or stop and ask yourself exactly what you're going to buy. Then make a beeline for those items and head to the cashier. This will keep you focused on your intentions, and it honors your resolve.

Look around one room in your home. If you were to suffer a natural disaster and lose everything you see, what would you miss? Would you feel relieved if certain items were lost? What is so durable that it could survive a flood? Let that information be your guide to future choices.



A top-down view of a white ceramic cup filled with brown coffee, sitting on a matching saucer. To the right is a small white pot containing a green succulent and white pebbles. Below these is a spiral-bound notebook with a blank, lined page. A silver pen and a white pencil lie horizontally below the notebook. At the bottom, a pair of white earbuds is visible. The entire scene is set against a plain white background.

5. Cultivate contentment.

Whether you're consuming food, drink, media, live entertainment, or the sights and sounds of recreational shopping, stay present. Take a moment to consider whether you're actually "full." Notice if you're consuming out of habit or boredom.

The key is to cultivate presence, Gielan says. That means developing an understanding of what truly brings us pleasure, and knowing how to savor what we're doing, eating, or watching in the moment.

Try This:

Whatever object you see first when you glance away from reading this, keep looking at it for 30 seconds. Try to view it as if you've never seen it before. Notice the detail, the color, the shape. This meditation technique trains your brain to focus on one thing at a time — and appreciate what you're seeing.

Track the moments of your day in a journal: what you eat, read, work on, drink, even daydream about. Just jot down a couple of short sentences about each. Then read them a few days later. You might be surprised to find how many moments you don't recall because you were operating on autopilot.

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