

So you've cleared out the clutter? Here's how to stay organized for good

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After you've got your chaos under control, how do you keep the clutter from creeping back? We asked Vicki Norris, author of *Restoring Order to Your Home*, for her strategies for staying ahead of the mess.

1. Make organizing a habit, not a one-time event.

"If you incorporate organizing into your daily routine, you'll prevent the mess from getting out of hand again," says Norris.

Institute daily or weekly rituals: Before the TV gets turned on at night, have everyone do a 10-minute tidy-up around the house. Pay your bills at a set time every other week. "If you have set times for cleaning and organizing, you'll be less likely to skip it," says Norris.

2. Fine-tune your systems.

"There's no cookie-cutter solution when it comes to staying organized," says Norris. "If your system is too complicated or time-consuming, it won't work."

Ask yourself some important questions: How often are you willing to file important papers? Are you more likely to write down appointments on a paper calendar or enter them into a computer?

And don't be afraid to ask a pal to pitch in, says Norris. "Friends are good at helping you sort through your clothes every six months, especially if they're willing to be honest about what doesn't look good."



3. Make it a family affair.

If you're not the only one who lives in the house, you shouldn't be the only one responsible for keeping it organized. "Assign everyone their own chores," says Norris. "Maybe your kids get dishwasher duty and your husband has to vacuum the car."

Write up your to-do list, and let everyone pick their activities. If at the end of the month things have run smoothly, make sure to reward a job well done with a favorite dinner or a trip to the movies.

4. Keep putting everything in its place.

Sure, all your stuff has a home – but how often does it find its way there? "Establish an easy way to move things throughout your house," says Norris, who recommends using an "up-and-down basket," on the stairs. "Whenever stuff needs to go upstairs, just place it in that basket and bring it up on your next trip." If the basket is at the wrong end of the stairs, just pile your stuff neatly until the basket finds its way back.

5. Keep your eyes on the prize.

"It's OK to get off course sometimes," says Norris. If your system is set up correctly, it shouldn't be too tough to get back on track. "Reevaluate your system if you're getting disorganized often," says Norris. "If your kids enter school or you change jobs, you may need to tweak what you're doing."

Most important, says Norris, keep your goal in mind: "You're not trying to make your home worthy of Martha Stewart – you're making more time for yourself!"