The Link Between Clutter and Depression

Clutter is a bummer - literally. A study that shows a link between depression and the amount of stuff in your home might convince you to declutter as a means of improving your own mental health.

Dishes in the sink, toys everywhere, stuff covering every flat surface; this clutter not only makes our homes look bad, it makes us feel bad, too. At least that's what researchers at UCLA's Center on Everyday Lives and Families (CELF) discovered when they explored the relationship between 32 California families and the thousands of objects in their homes. The resulting book, *Life at Home in the Twenty-First Century,* is a rare look at how middle-class Americans use the space in their homes and interact with the things they accumulate over a lifetime.

It turns out that clutter has a profound effect on our mood and self-esteem. CELF's anthropologists, social scientists, and archaeologists found:

- **A link between high cortisol (stress hormone) levels in female home owners and a high density of household objects.** The more stuff, the more stress women feel. Men, on the other hand, don't seem bothered by mess, which accounts for tensions between tidy wives and their clutter bug hubbies.

> *"Declutter the mess in your home and heart. Don't let your past crowd out your future."*
> ~ Dr. Thelma Bryant-Davis

- **Women associate a tidy home with a happy and successful family.** The more dishes that pile up in the sink, the more anxious women feel.

- **Even families that want to reduce clutter are often emotionally paralyzed** when it comes to sorting and pitching objects. They either can't break sentimental attachments to objects or believe their things have hidden monetary value.

- **Although U.S. consumers bear only 3% of the world's children, they buy 40% of the world's toys.** And these toys live in every room, fighting for display space with kids' trophies, artwork, and snapshots of their last soccer game.

Here are some simple things that you can do to de-clutter your home and raise your spirits:

1. **Adopt the Rule of Five.** Every time you get up from your desk or walk through a room, put away five things. Or, each hour, devote five minutes to de-cluttering - by the end of the day, you will have cleaned for an hour.

2. **Pledge to clear and clean your kitchen sink every day.** It takes a couple of seconds more to place a dish in the dishwasher rather than dump it in the sink. A clean sink will instantly raise your spirits and decrease your anxiety.

3. **Return to yesteryear when only photos of ancestors or weddings earned a place on a shelf.** Put snapshots in a family album, which will immediately de-clutter many flat surfaces.

4. **Unburden your refrigerator door.** Researchers found a correlation between the number of items stuck to the outside of the fridge door and the amount of clutter throughout the house. Toss extra magnets, file restaurant menus, and place calendars in less conspicuous places.
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5. **Fill a box with items you don't love or use.** Seal the box and place it in a closet. If you haven't opened the box in a year, donate it (unopened!) to charity.

Reference: http://www.houselogic.com/blog/home-improvement/clutter-depression/