

This Year, Try Spring Cleaning Your Brain

Five ways to soothe a mind overstimulated by anxiety, stress and streams of information.

The following is excerpted from the article “This Year, Try Spring Cleaning Your Brain” by Christina Caron, columnist for The New York Times, March 14, 2022.

Coronavirus cases are receding across the United States, and face masks are coming off. Little green shoots are finally poking through the earth, signaling the arrival of warmer weather. The pandemic has not been declared over, but after living in survival mode for the last two years, some would say we are emerging into a “new normal.” Though that doesn’t mean our minds are at ease.



Credit...Seb Agresti

Many have endured illness, economic upheaval, the climate crisis, grief and racial inequities. Add to that inflation, supply chain issues and the ripple effects of Russia’s war with Ukraine — three of the biggest sources of stress among people in the United States right now, according to [a recent poll](#) for the American Psychological Association.

Perhaps, experts say, the arrival of spring can serve as a natural point to take stock of our mental well-being and reconnect with the things that bring us purpose and joy, offering our brains a respite when possible. **Here are five ways to declutter your mind as we enter a new season.**

Practice mindfulness

[Mindfulness meditation](#), a practice that helps you remember to return to the present when you become distracted, [has been shown](#) to reduce the stress of daily life.

When people notice that their mind is racing or they start to become anxious, they are typically thinking about something in the past or in the future.

To refocus on the here and now, you can start by noticing the sensations in the body. “Can we feel the ground below us? The heat of the sun?” It is normal for the mind to wander. If this happens, gently return your awareness to your breathing and come back to the present.

Try the Bullet Journal method

Studies have found that [jotting down thoughts in a journal](#) can improve well-being.

One method that has gained popularity is a practice created by Ryder Carroll and outlined in his best-selling book, “The Bullet Journal Method: Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future.”

Through journaling, Mr. Carroll discovered a pattern: The experiences that gave him a sense of purpose or pride all involved helping others and performing acts of service.

Reduce information overload

We have all been inundated by a relentless news cycle, a fire hose of information coming at us in the form of breaking news notifications, social media posts and email newsletters that can leave us feeling anxious, angry or even helpless.

Choose just one or two reliable sources and read them at a specific time each day, he advised. For example, you can listen to a news roundup podcast while commuting to work or read a newspaper at breakfast, Dr. Newport said.

Declutter your physical space

“Messy spaces tend to prevent clear cognitive thinking,” said Catherine Roster, a professor at the Anderson School of Management at the University of New Mexico who has researched how cluttered homes affect people. “It has a distorting effect that can bleed into other aspects of a person’s life.”

Dr. Roster suggested relying on a buddy — ideally someone who is also decluttering their home. Together the two of you can serve as a sounding board for each other to make decisions about what to keep and stay on schedule.

Reconnect with the people you love

If there are people you care about whom you have lost touch with during the pandemic, don’t be shy about getting back in touch, she urged. “We need the support and levity of people who make us feel good,” Dr. Greenberg said.

If it has been a while, it might feel awkward at first to re-establish contact. But just be honest, Dr. Greenberg advised. For example, you might say: “We lost touch during the pandemic, but now things are calming down and I would really love to see you. Not seeing you has been one of the things I’ve missed.”

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