9 Things You May Not Realize Are Causing You Anxiety



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Everything feels chaotic right now. It’s probably hard for you to focus. The solution: You need to treat your life the way you’d treat your closet — and organize it.

We often think of “organizing” as something we do with physical things: We have to put our laundry away, clean the kitchen or the looming garage. But your mind may feel cluttered because of things that you rarely see. They contribute to a sense of chaos in your life. Chaos breeds anxiety, and can lead to a lack of direction and focus.

So where can you start cleaning up that chaos? Consider your smartphone, calendar, and photos. If they’re disorganized, you

may *feel* disorganized! And when you start creating order, you'll feel more orderly.

Here are nine things you may not realize are causing you anxiety, and how to fix them – even while you're stuck inside your home.

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1. All Your Smartphone Apps

You probably look at your smartphone throughout the day – and if that environment is cluttered, psychologists say, it can clog up your neural network and slow down your thinking. Time to fix that.

Go through all your apps one by one, and ask yourself, "When was the last time I used this app?" If your answer is six months ago or longer, then delete it. These apps are cluttering your view, and they're probably costing you money. When you upgrade your phone, you might see that you need more storage – and then you'll spend more to get it, even though it's mostly going to unused apps.

Once you're down to the essential apps, sort them into folders by type. Some examples: *Entertainment, Financial, Food, Health, Music, News.* Next, move your folders to the *second* page of your home screen. Move your settings app to the third page. And what happens to the first screen? You leave it blank. That way, the first screen is peace of mind, the second screen is function, and the last screen is adjusting how the entire phone operates for you.

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2. The Smells Around You

Invisible things around us can cause anxiety and discomfort. For example, scents are deeply connected to the emotional and memory centers of the brain – meaning that the wrong smells can be very distracting.

Take control of your environment by strategically deploying different scents around you. Your work area could smell differently from your bedroom, for example. Or you can replace distracting, old smells with fresh, new ones. Because options for trying out new scents are limited right now, stick with scents you know or have done research on.

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3. Your Crazy Inbox

People like to talk about "inbox zero" – having a completely empty email inbox. It sounds nice, but it also sounds impossible. Here's the thing, though: Inbox zero doesn't mean you've gotten rid of all your emails! It just means you've *organized* them.

Think of it like this: You can treat the emails in your inbox the same way you would treat mail in your mailbox. When the mail arrives, you sort through it and put everything in its place. The same is true for email. Once you've opened any email, either immediately respond to it, trash it or move it into a folder. Every email program allows you to create folders, so you can categorize your emails. If you need to return to an email, just leave it in your inbox and then catagorize it once you've responded. Now you know where everything is.

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4. Your (Lack of) Movements

It’s no secret that exercise can help reduce stress, but thinking about exercising can cause stress too. So sit down and make an achievable workout plan; you want something simple enough that you’ll actually do it.

You can start with low-repetition bodyweight exercises – which is to say, exercises that only require your body (like a push-up or a plank), and that you don’t have to repeat too many times. When these moves start feeling easy, add more to make it feel challenging.

Here’s a great beginner workout plan with two levels of growth. And please, use proper form and modify as needed:

Beginner

Plank: 30 seconds

Push-ups: 10 repetitions

Squats: 10 repetitions

Rest for 1 minute and grab a drink of water. Then repeat 2 more times.

Intermediate

Plank with Shoulder Taps: 45 seconds

Push-ups with Feet Elevated: 10 repetitions

Jump Squats: 10 repetitions

Rest for 1 minute and grab a drink of water. Then repeat 2 more times.

Advanced

Plank Up/Downs: 60 seconds

Spider-Man Push-ups: 10 repetitions

Bulgarian Split Squats: 10 repetitions

Rest for 1 minute and grab a drink of water. Then repeat 2 more times.

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5. Your Cluttered Photo Folder

The photo folder in your phone is probably bloated. Time to clean it out – and you can start by deleting anything you don't want. Chances are, you'll find a bunch of screenshots you forgot about or maybe a few pictures of the inside of your pocket. It'll feel good getting rid of them, even if they're digital.

Next, create folders for what you're keeping, and label them either by event, date or specific location. Also, batch edit the names of the photos that will be living in these folders. This will allow you to find specific photos from moments you want to remember for years to come. Now is an excellent time to work on this task, because we can all use a stroll down memory lane to distract us. Want to dig a little deeper? Always back your photo library or original copy of your photos onto an external drive or cloud-based service.

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6. Your Disorganized Contact List

Sometimes, without realizing it, our phones will start storing and displaying the contacts that we have gathered over multiple email accounts. This can get messy, as contacts from your personal and work emails become mushed together. In fact,

as my organizational consultancy works through this problem with clients, we find that 80 percent of them have no idea where most of their contacts even came from.

To fix this, start by reviewing all your contacts and deleting any you do not need. Next, pick only *one* email account for your device to pull information from. (You can do this through your phone's account settings.) After that, look at all your pertinent contacts – family, friends, valuable colleagues and so on – and make sure their file contains all the pertinent information, such as full names, mobile numbers, email addresses and maybe birthdays and mailing addresses.

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7. What You're Unnecessarily Remembering

Think of your brain as a compuer. Both of these things process and store information. And just like a computer, your brain can slow down if it's asked to process too much. So lighten the load. What are you keeping in your head that could be elsewhere instead?

Your household needs are one example. Instead of making a grocery list when you need to go shopping, or trying to keep track of your evolving needs in your head, help yourself out by making multiple *starter* lists. These lists should be digital and easily sharable with your family. For example, what are all the cleaning supplies you usually buy? Jot them down in a list. What about beverages? Jot those down. Now when you need to go shopping, you can consult those lists and easily plan your trip or online purchase – without having to burden your brain.

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8. Your Inconsistent Workspace

Working from home can be distracting, especially if you have kids. But it’s even *more* distracting to work in ever-changing spaces. We’re creatures of habit, and we need routine to truly focus. We do our best work in a space that’s designated for work — so if your home can accommodate it, you should create a designated space and then maintain it.

Sit down as a household, and discuss how some spaces in the house will be changing for a little bit. This includes your workspace. Now it’s time to make that space as work-friendly as possible. Targeting your senses is a great way to remind your brain that it’s time to concentrate. Colors and light do more than you may realize to keep you crossing things off your to-do list. Natural light in a work space can reduce eye strain and improve your mood, productivity and satisfaction. Shift your computer’s light settings to reduce eye strain and headaches caused by blue light. Spirit animals, totems and plants can inspire mental fortitude and clarity.

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9. What You’re Wearing Right Now!

Before people went into lockdown, they may have daydreamed about working in pajamas. Now it can finally happen — and it’s probably not what they hoped for. By afternoon, those pajamas can make people feel lazy and gross.

Clothing matters: It’s a signal to ourselves about whether we’re at work, at play or ready for bed. That doesn’t mean you need to be dressed for work at 9 a.m., but you *should* set a schedule that helps you feel in charge of your day. For example, from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m., you could wear pajamas, then change into activewear and work out, and then eat lunch, shower and change into something more professional to finish

out the day. You won’t feel bad about rocking those comfy clothes if it’s part of your routine, and changing into your work clothes later could afford you some late-day productivity.

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