

BRONXTimesReporter

Spring cleaning: It's about more than just your home

By Mitchel Rabinowitz, Occupational Therapist with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY)

If you've watched the recent Netflix hit *Tidying Up* with Marie Kondo or read the best-selling book behind the craze, you likely understand the importance that a good "spring clean" and valuation can have on your home and, more importantly, your life.

Marie Kondo's "KonMari method" encourages people to assess their belongings and rid themselves of clothing, books, papers, miscellaneous items and sentimental items (in that order) that no longer "spark joy." Her method has been hailed not only as an effective technique for organizing people's homes and environments, but also for its ability to completely shift the psyche of all those who employ it. Clutter—be it in your apartment, your mind or otherwise—can negatively influence many aspects of human health, including mood, stress levels, memory and even emotional intelligence. As Kondo's clients know, and as research supports, the benefits of decluttering can improve everything from sleep to focus to life satisfaction.

I may not be a best-selling author or Netflix star like Ms. Kondo, but as an Occupational

Therapist (OT) with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY), I do work with people of all ages who, following surgery or as the result of a health crisis, need to pay special attention to keeping their homes organized, orderly and safe.

One of the first things OTs do to help people streamline or modify their everyday activities (or "occupations") is to provide evaluations of the home and other environments, coming up with adaptive training strategies and educating patients and family caregivers about new routines. We do this all with the end goal of making our patients' environments and day-to-day lifestyles work for them. So, while Marie Kondo might ask a client "What sparks joy?" as an OT, my colleagues and I are more likely to ask "What works for you?"

In the spirit of spring cleaning, here are a few bits of advice I regularly share with patients and their caregivers to help them tidy up their homes and lifestyle habits, allowing them to stay engaged and to maintain the skills needed to function in day-to-day activities, all of which operate around the central subject of what works for each of them.

Keep the Items You Use—and Make a Plan for What You

Don't

If you're between 50 and 85, it's likely that your home has accumulated, well, a lifetime's worth of stuff! It's easy to let years of tax returns, remnants of old jobs, sentimental objects from friends and family and other relics of the past amass, but a cluttered home is not just an unhappy home: It's an unsafe home. Having extra stuff around your house exacerbates the risk of tripping and experiencing a fall-related injury. What's more, if your eyesight is declining, it can seriously increase the difficulty of finding items you do need. Be merciless in your decision-making about what to keep and what to let go of and follow through once you decide. Consider utilizing storage rental spaces in your area for items that are no longer of use to you or donate anything that could be of use to someone else. Remember, stuff is just that—stuff!

Small Modifications Prevent Big Injuries

It's easy to overlook things in your home, especially when they have been the same for many years, but those with mobility issues and those over the age of 65 do so at their own risk. The CDC reports that more than one out of four older adults experience falls each year, and three million are



Mitchel Rabinowitz, Occupational Therapist with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY), with one of his patients.

treated at the emergency room for fall related injuries. Small adjustments, such as taping down a rug, installing a grab bar in the shower or using a rubber mat in the bathroom, will make a substantial difference in creating a safer home environment in which to age in place. Check out this *How to Prevent Trips and Falls* in the Home video for more suggestions.

Rearrange Your Stuff to Meet Your Priorities

When I evaluate people's homes, I think about clients' safety and convenience. Reorganizing your home may seem daunting, but it is critical to reducing injury from overstraining or falling. For example, if you love to make eggs

every day, but reaching for the frying pan is putting a strain on your back, swap out your pan location for somewhere more readily accessible. Keeping appliances—even small appliances, like a hair dryer—in a readily accessible place, as opposed to the back of the under-the-sink storage cabinet, is a good way to avoid losing your balance or risking a fall. Simple steps can make all the difference!

Mitchel Rabinowitz is an Occupational Therapist with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York. To learn more about the wide array of home care services available through the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, please call 1-800-675-0391, or visit www.vnsny.org.