

# ORGANIZE YOUR LIFE!



## IN THIS ISSUE, WE WILL DISCUSS:

THE PERILS OF STRESS

FINDING TIME AND ENERGY TO GET  
AND STAY ORGANIZED

PREPARATION FOR THE HOLIDAYS  
TO CLEAN OR NOT TO CLEAN, THAT IS  
THE QUESTION!



*Happy  
Holidays!*

## THE PERILS OF STRESS

I know a sweet older woman who had a perfectly organized house. Not a fork or vase was out of place. Unfortunately, she was trapped in a marriage that made her miserable. Eventually they separated. At first, nothing changed. The house was the same spotless museum it always was. As time went and she began to live her own life, however, her house started to reflect her new freedom. Everything was clean, but she didn't spend all her free time keeping it perfect. She started to feel like it was OK to leave dishes in the sink, instead of leaving her guests alone while she filled the dishwasher. Now, she's happier than she's ever been, and her house is every bit as well-adjusted as she is.

It's remarkable how stress affects our lives. Most of the time, we don't even realize it. It makes some people neater and some sloppier. It makes some people distracted and other people focused. But one affect it has on everyone is that stress makes you more likely to be sick, more likely to get angry, and less likely to get a good night's sleep.

How does stress affect your life? Being aware of this can help you cope with it. Think about some of the things you do that you're not proud of. Do you swear like a drunken sailor when someone forgets to use their signal on the freeway? Do you snap at strangers? Do you get angry at family for silly things that aren't important? Do you find yourself suffering from strange aches and pains? Now think about how you feel when these things happen. Stress often makes you feel hopeless, pressured, overwhelmed, and out of control. Do you think there's a con-

nection? Once you've cleared this up in your mind, you can take positive steps to improve your life. For example, is your clutter the source of stress in your life, or is it actually just the symptom?

Let me tell you a story about two kinds of clients I have worked with. Let's call the first one Audrey, and the second one Buffy. Audrey and Buffy have both asked for my help with the clutter in their houses. I worked with both clients to solve their clutter problems once and for all. Two months later, during a follow up visit, I found very different results.

Audrey had transformed completely. She was happier, more relaxed, and had a better outlook on her life. She felt like she had conquered her demon, and was a better person for it. Her clutter was the source of her stress, and getting rid of the clutter got rid of the stress.

Buffy had not changed her attitude a bit. She had kept up the system perfectly, and was now a little obsessed with it. The clutter was a symptom of her stress, not the cause--Buffy works seventy hour weeks. She decided that she wanted new closets to complement her newly organized life, and is now taking out her stress on the remodelers.

A shopaholic who stops shopping is likely to become a chocoholic, unless he or she comes to terms with the source of their compulsion. Remember that when you work to improve your life, you always need to target the sources of your stress, not the symptoms.

# FINDING TIME AND ENERGY TO GET AND STAY ORGANIZED

During one of my workshops, I was asked:

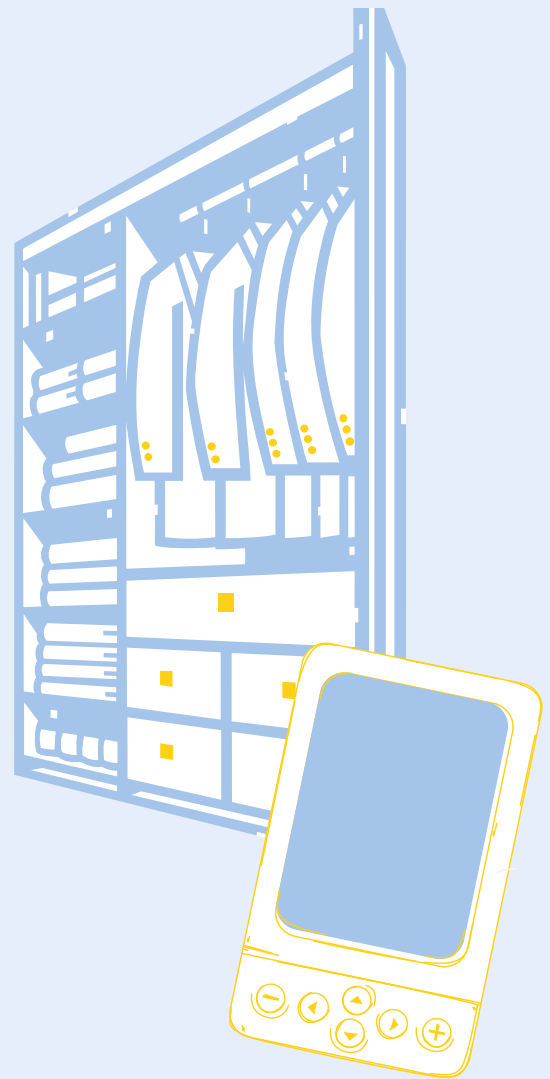
***“How do I find the time and energy to get organized and stay organized?”***

This particular question really stuck out in my mind. For one thing, a lot of my clients have this problem, and as much as I wish I had a magic wand to add another two hours to the day, I don't. Finding the time and energy to be organized means rearranging your life. You'll probably find at the end that you have more time than when you started, but getting there is hard. The first step in making this happen is to figure out your priorities. For example, what is more important to you, your loved ones or a spotless kitchen? This one should be obvious, but sometimes we can get carried away. I know that I've told friends not to come over so that I can scrub the floor, which is ridiculous.

The goal here is to create balance. Schedule time to clean when you can afford the time to do it, instead of letting it intrude on your time with family and friends. Delegate some of this less-than-memorable jobs to others, such as your children, or a part time house-keeper. If keeping your house clean is important to you, you can always find the money, but that also means you will have to give something else up. By figuring out your priorities you can focus on what is important to you, eliminate or delegate the tasks that are not, and find time for what you have to do. A lot of times when people say they don't have the energy to do something, it is because something is holding them back. There are lots of variations on this, but they boil down to one of two things: we assume the worst, or we don't know where to start. We see the daunting pile of papers or laundry and think one of two things: “Where do I start”, or “I'll never finish”. Either one will make you throw up your hands in despair.

The way to get past this is by being direct and realistic. Start with what's closest to you, even if it might make more sense to start with somewhere else. Divide the task into manageable portions and get Part One done well. As long as you get started and keep coming back and chipping away at the pile you will eventually get through it. Don't be so demanding of yourself that you put high expectations on such a large undertaking. Plan an hour or two each week and before you know it you will get through it.

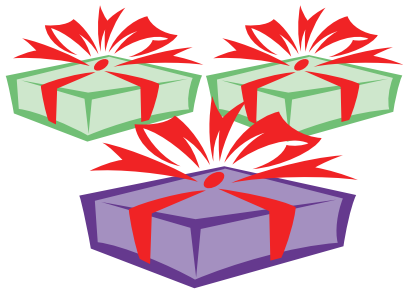
Staying organized is even more challenging than getting organized. It is all about changing bad habits and creating good ones. The key to sticking to the new habits is figuring out realistic ones for you. For example, saying that you are going to have an immaculate desk every night may not work for you. What might be more realistic would be having orderly piles stacked up of the numerous projects you are working on. You could even find a bin organizer that would help with such a system.



# PREPARATION FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Let's face it, the holiday season can be stressful. You have a big dinner to cook, the house to clean, and gifts to buy, and let's not even mention wrapping presents! How can you possibly survive all that holiday cheer? You have to plan ahead and divide and conquer. What does that mean? Let me focus on the two holidays I know best, Chanukah and Christmas. There's one week until Chanukah, and four weeks until Christmas. That doesn't give you a lot of time, but with the proper organizing skills anything can be accomplished.

First, look around you and see what you still have to do. What gifts are left to get? Do you have wrapping paper, tape, and bows? Do you have a menu planned for that holiday dinner? Are you going to have a traditional Chanukah and get 8 gifts for each family member, or just one? Are you putting names into a hat and drawing for gifts, or buying one for everyone? Do you know what the rest of the family is doing? What do you need to do to prep the house? Are there visitors staying, grandchildren, and fiancés? Now that you have looked around and answered the questions, you need to make a plan of action.



## Gifts

If you haven't finished holiday shopping, make a shopping list. This includes shopping that you will do online. The list should look something like this:

Sheryl:

Slippers - TJ Maxx

Gift certificate to borders - website

Mom:

????

Bill:

New brief case - Office Depot

Hand made scarf - me

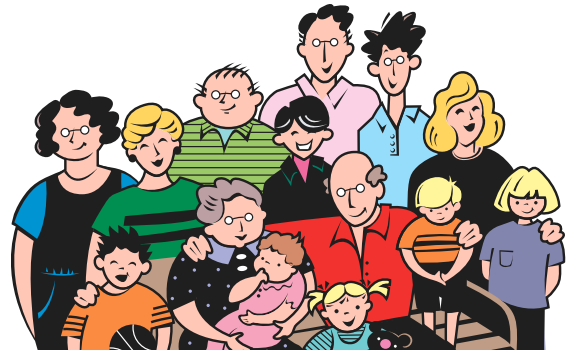
Dad:

New drill - home depot

Chocolate covered cherries -

<http://www.cadbury.co.uk/EN/CTB2003/>

Decide now if you are willing to pay someone to wrap your gifts to save time, or if you are going to wrap all the gifts. If you enjoy wrapping, then make time on your schedule. If not, pay someone else to do it. After all, you still get to choose the wrapping paper! If you have a relative that is impossible to buy for I suggest a gift certificate at their favorite store. They don't have a favorite store, give them a consumable gift. For example, bubble bath, soap set, gift certificate, wine, cheese, fruit, movie tickets, a trip to the spa, manicure, or pedicure. You get the idea, something they can and will use!



## House guests

You have relatives coming to stay for a few days and the spare bedroom has become the "store all room". You only have a short time to organize and clean it out. If you only have one week, purchase inexpensive file boxes from Office Depot and store all of the items that have been shoved in the room in the closet for now. Be sure to go through them after the holidays and organize them for real! If you have 4 weeks, you have more time to actually sort, purge and contain. Look at the room and decide what needs to be done. Too much stuff? You are going to need to purge. Not enough space? Perhaps you have too much furniture or a poor layout for the room. Too much clutter? Purge and contain. Whatever the problem you need a plan of action. Go through the items in the room and decide what you want where. For example, if you have extra office supplies and you have an office, then they belong in your office. If you have a closet full of never worn clothes, donate or consign them. If you have books you plan to read, you borrowed, or have already read, put them on the bookshelf, return them to their rightful owners, and sell the ones you have already read. The only reason to keep books that you have read is if you use them for research or really plan to read them again. Keeping a few is ok. Keeping the entire 20-volume set of Teen Valley is not.

*Preparation For the Holidays Continued on Page 4*

# PREPARATION FOR THE HOLIDAYS

## Continued From Page 3

Next thing: do you have a bed or an air mattress? That should be pulled out and aired out for the guest. Making room in the closet is always nice for them to hang their clothes, but if you've shoved all your boxes in there, they'll have to do without.

Now that you have organized the guest room, it needs to be cleaned. If it is in your budget I would suggest hiring cleaners to come in and do your whole house. If it isn't, take it one room at a time.

## The Meal

Planning a nice meal can take a lot of time. If you have just started to entertain, you might not have a lot of cookbooks or good resources to refer to for recipes. There are a ton of recipe books out there! How do you know what is good and what isn't? You can read reviews on <http://www.amazon.com>, or you can ask your family and friends what cookbooks they love. My favorite essential cookbook is "The Joy of Cooking". When you're in a pinch and need to know, for example, how to bake a potato or what "chiffonade" means, the Joy will help.

For an even better resource on a budget, try <http://www.epicurious.com>. This web site has tens of thousands of recipes that are easily searchable. They're well organized, and they have featured recipes for the holidays. If all else fails, good old Google can help you find what you need--just type "recipe soufganyot" and you'll be set.

If it is your first time cooking a huge meal, don't pick recipes that are too complicated. Look for dishes that you mix once and cook once, instead of things that have many steps in and out of the



oven. You want to enjoy this experience so you do it again! Be sure to keep the recipes that you like so you can use them again. That is why getting into the habit of organizing your recipes now will provide you with a place to put planned meals and refer back to. Think of it like a card catalog. I suggest one of the following:

- Old fashioned index cards. Put the recipes on these and organize them by type, alphabetical or food group. You can pull it out and take it with you to the store and put it back when you are done.

- Putting them on your PDA - you can carry this with you to the store, the recipe and the shopping list all on a light little PDA! You can enter them on your PC, which has a nice big keyboard, and then sync them to your PDA. If the recipe is online, you can just copy-paste.
- Keeping "Bookmarks" or "Favorites" of the best online recipes. You can just print them off and carry them with you to the store. Put sticky notes on the pages of the recipes you like best. This is the simplest way of all, and makes browsing for recipes quick and easy. If you do this, keep a binder full of recipe printouts from the recipes you get online so you have all your favorites in one place.
- Creating a beautiful scrapbook full of your favorite recipes - a bit impractical because it will be heavy to carry around when grocery shopping, but a great memory book, not to mention inspirational.
- Put sticky notes on the pages of the recipes you like best. This is the simplest way of all, and makes browsing for recipes quick and easy. If you do this, keep a binder full of recipe printouts from the recipes you get online so you have all your favorites in one place.

Now that you have chosen the way you want to organize and store your favorite meal plans, we can move on to making the shopping list. Take the recipes and see what you have in the cupboards and what you don't. Lightly cross out the ingredients you already have. This is a great way to save

**Preparation For the Holidays  
Continued on Page 5**

# PREPARATION FOR THE HOLIDAYS

*Continued From Page 4*



money! Now you are ready to go to the grocery store and get what you need to prepare the meal. But wait! What day is the meal and when should you pick up the supplies? I would again look at the recipes and see how long each one takes. What can be made early and frozen? What needs to be made fresh? What ingredients last (like flour) and which ones need to be bought the day of (like fish)? What recipes will make your house smell like heaven when your guests walk in--be sure you cook one of those on the day of the dinner. It sounds like you have more research to do.

Have you made the recipe before? Or is it a new one? If you have four weeks, maybe you should practice making it, especially if it is a difficult thing to make. If you only have one week, I suggest that you start cooking what can be frozen now and cook one thing each night before the due date. Here is an example of a menu:

*Apple pie* - Prepare this the day of the dinner. It will make the house smell wonderful and baking a pie can be relaxing. You speed this up by buying a ready-bake pie crust. Be sure to make the fruit innards delectable. Hint: this is also an easy one to fake if something goes wrong! Just grab a pie from the store and reheat it in your oven. Sprinkle with a little fresh cinnamon before it goes in, and you're set. Fortunately, it only takes 45-60 minutes to bake a pie, so you can put it in as the entrée comes out.

*Fresh baked bread*- While I love fresh bread out the oven, this can be made earlier in the week and frozen. I have done so and if wrapped tightly in two layers of

tin foil, it tastes great when you thaw it in the oven! If you have a breadmaker, this is a no-brainer: just set everything up, following the directions in the recipe book that came with it, and set the timer. It'll be ready on time and the house will smell great. Be careful about using the premixed packages that you can buy at the store--they make too much dough for some breadmakers. You might want to make a test-loaf earlier in the week. For the easiest alternative of all, get a fully baked loaf, sprinkle it with a little water, and heat it up in the oven. Be sure to use a timer--more than five minutes (for a baguette) and it'll be burned!

*Turkey* - This should be cleaned and soaked the night before and then put in the oven mid morning the day of the dinner. **DON'T FORGET** that it can take a week or more to thaw a turkey in your fridge! There are faster ways, like putting it in water that you change regularly, but they require more work and offer a greater chance for bacteria to grow. Hint: in a test last year by Cook's Illustrated, they recommended either a Butterball turkey or any kosher turkey as having the best taste. You can find kosher turkeys in the Seattle area at the Mercer Island Albertson's or the U Village QFC--just ask for the kosher meat department.

*Nondairy Vegetarian lasagna* - Soy cheese, vegetables, and good noodles can make a great dinner that almost anybody can eat. This can be made a week ahead of time, frozen or refrigerated, and put in the oven a few hours before dinner. Don't over schedule your oven if it's also being used for turkey!

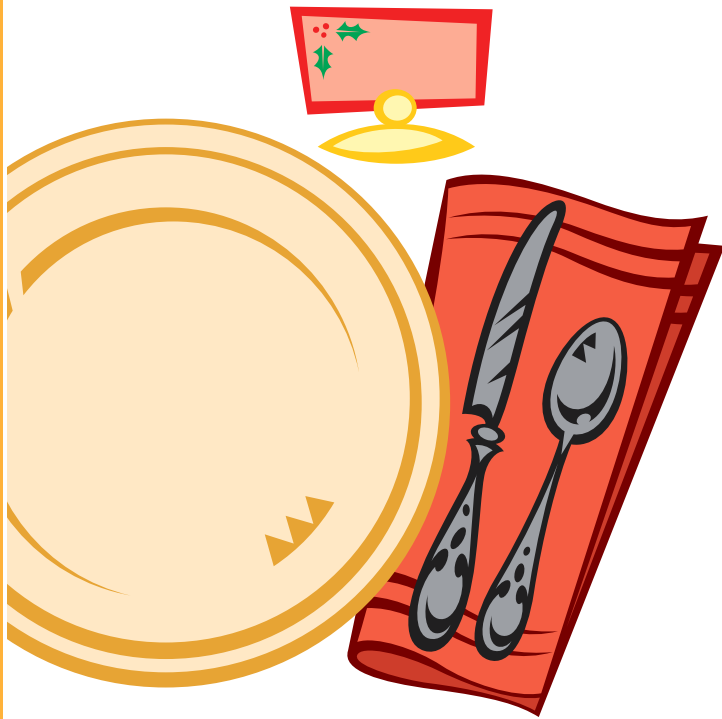
*Salad* - This should be done shortly before the guests arrive or the vegetables can get soggy. If you want to prepare it further in advance, mix everything except the lettuce and cucumbers (which get soggy the fastest) and throw those in at the last minute. Wash and dry the lettuce and store it in a paper towel in the fridge until it's ready.

The best time to go shopping is later in the evening. If you have a 24 hour grocery store, even better. I get my best grocery shopping done at 10pm! There are no lines, and you can rush through the aisles picking up everything you need without the hassle of weaving through other carts. Since you are going to be cooking all week, I would go shopping on Monday (if dinner is on Friday). Everything you purchase should stay fresh for five days, including lettuce greens--if it doesn't you bought a bum bag! Organic produce sometimes doesn't last quite as long, so you might buy that a little later.

***Preparation For the Holidays Continued on Page 6***

# PREPARATION FOR THE HOLIDAYS

*Continued From Page 5*



## The Table

Admit it, You love the image of a perfectly-set table that every magazine on the checkout stand has on its cover. You imagine your table with beautiful dinnerware, crisp cloth napkins and a spotless table cloth. How the heck can you do this to?! **DELEGATE!** If you are particular about the table setting and how you want it to look, have someone else stir the soup, or chop vegetables while you set it. If your loved one works late and can't help, this may be something you do the night before. You could also pay your teenage neighbor to watch the soup while you set the table (this may be difficult if they are celebrating the same holiday as you--you may be on your own!).

Now that you have thought of everything, you need to schedule when it's going to happen. The gifts come first, preparing for houseguests is second, meal planning is third, and cleaning the house is last. Once again, consider hiring a cleaner for the week of the holiday--it's a great present to give yourself. The kitchen will be trashed again when you begin prepping the meal, but it will be a heck of a lot easier to clean up once it has been deep cleaned.

## TO CLEAN OR NOT TO CLEAN, THAT IS THE QUESTION!

You have just had a fabulous holiday dinner. The guests are lounging comfortably on your couches, trying to make room for that apple pie. Now there are two possibilities.

The first possibility is that in the kitchen, you have dirty pots and pans covering the stove top and piled high in the kitchen sink. The dining room table is piled with dirty dishes. The countertops in the kitchen are covered with food, and the appliances you used to prepare the dinner are spattered with food and scattered everywhere. You need to clear the dining room table, but you have nowhere to do it.

The second possibility is that you've been cleaning as you go. This is only possible if you've managed to follow my recommenda-

tions in the last article, and you've planned enough time for all the cooking! If you do this, you have the luxury of running the dishwasher whenever you need to, instead of frantically trying to hand-wash the mixing bowls so you can use them for the next project. You start your dinner with a relatively neat kitchen, so it's not as much of a disaster by the time dinner is over. You can simply move the dishes from the table to the sink, and dessert can be served immediately.

And what happens if you don't? Well, you wind up running into the kitchen to shuffle dirty dishes. Guests feel like they have to help, and you decline, they feel uncomfortable. You wind up with a pile of dirty dishes on top of all the appliances and measuring cups, and

you're either up till 3 AM scrubbing, or faced with a solid crust of greasy goop in the morning.

What if you don't have the opportunity to cook ahead of time? The answer: clean as you go, and delegate. Hopefully, you are fortunate to have a loved one or ones in your household that can help. Assign them the task of washing pots and pans as you cook. Have someone else set the table. This is a great chore for a child 7 or older (minus the crystal wine glasses!) What if you are a fantastic chef that hates to clean as you go? It ruins the

***To Clean or Not To Clean, That Is The Question***  
***Continued on Page 7***

# TO CLEAN OR NOT TO CLEAN, THAT IS THE QUESTION!

## *Continued From Page 6*

cooking mode? DELEGATE! In my family, my husband loves to cook and hates to stop to clean pans individually. That is where I come in. I love putting the kitchen back in order, so it is a perfect system! I realize I am a little out of the ordinary, so if you both hate to clean up, swap jobs every other dinner party. If one of you cooks, the other cleans. Or if both of you are cooking, you clean up after yourself. After all, even if you are a creative chef, it is much easier to cook in a neat kitchen!

When you do clean as you go, you will realize that there is still a bit of a disaster in the kitchen after you eat. So what? This is normal. It is ok to have a bit of a mess. Be sure to keep the dishwasher empty so you can load it full after your guests go to bed or leave. The key is to also keep the sink empty of large pots and pans so you have somewhere to dump and soak the dirty dishes when you clear the table. Unfortunately, they have yet to come

up with a dishwasher that actually scrubs the crusted over dishes! If the sink full of dishes makes you crazy, cover it with a cloth and move on. What if you have china? Carefully soak the china in soapy water and wash it by hand later. If it is just family coming, you can do a bit of dish washing after dessert. It does tend to put a damper on the evening though. What is the worst that can happen? You clean the kitchen when you wake up! I have to admit, that this is very hard for me to do, but so is having my guests feel uncomfortable and leave early because I can't stand a mess in my kitchen. I have finally come to a resolution that I would rather have my guests stay and have fun then end up cleaning and going to bed early. It was that simple when I looked at what I was doing realistically! Remember to clean as you go when you cook and you will have an easier time serving dessert.



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