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Clutter 101: the **bedside** challenge

In the second of her six-part series on tackling physical, emotional and psychological clutter, Johannesburg life coach Kate Emmerson explains **how your bedside table could be the first step to a lighter life.**

In the first part of this series (see the December/January 2011 issue of *Psychologies*), I suggested doing an audit to estimate how much money your clutter could be costing you over the course of a year. But banishing unnecessary 'stuff' requires practical action, too, so the next step is to try a simple exercise – clearing your bedside table – today, keeping in mind that you are in control of your clutter, not the other way around.

I advise starting with your bedside table for two good reasons. Firstly, it's a relatively small space so you can make a huge impact in an hour or less. Secondly, it's what you lay eyes on last thing at night and first thing in the morning – it affects your sleep and ability to rejuvenate.

What to aim for

Your bedside table should not be a dumping ground; it should lift your spirits immediately. Aim to reserve the table surface exclusively for things

you need when you're in bed. These might include a book or magazine you are currently reading, your cellphone, appropriate lighting and a glass of water. It's a good idea to choose one thing that inspires you, too, such as spiritual material, your journal or a beautiful object.

Try to limit the contents of your bedside cupboard to a few items used only in the bedroom: a manicure set, medication, a brush, and so on.

Don't be tempted to keep more than two books here, as this will only overwhelm your senses and put you under pressure – you'll feel guilty each time you look at the pile of unread material. Strive not to keep anything next to your bed that's not directly related to sleeping, rejuvenating your body or sex!





What you need

To get started, you'll need four boxes or black plastic bags. Label each one as follows:

- **RUBBISH** Items you're throwing away.
- **RECYCLING** Things to be given away, sold, recycled or returned to their rightful owner.
- **REPAIRS** Projects or possessions that need fixing, altering or completing.
- **RELOCATE** Articles that belong in another part of the house. Close your eyes and think about locating the object in question. Ideally, you know exactly where it lives and so won't waste an ounce

of energy thinking about where to find it. For example, kitchen scissors always live in the second drawer.

If you plan to clear several areas in your home, it's easiest to let the last three boxes ('recycling', 'repairs', 'relocate') fill up before taking action. But do empty the box labelled 'rubbish' after each session for a sense of completion.

The four-step plan

1. REMOVE Take all the items from within, on top of, behind or around your bedside table and place them in a pile on the floor.

2. CLEAN Give the area a quick wipe with a duster or damp cloth.

3. DECIDE Pick up each item to assess what to do with it, handling it just once. Make a decision immediately by asking yourself these three powerful questions: Do I really love it? Do I find it useful? Does it add value to my life? Be honest, brave and ruthless as you evaluate your clutter.

4. ALLOCATE If you answered yes to all three questions in Step 3, you now need to decide if your bedside is the item's rightful home or if it belongs in the 'relocate' box. Clean all the items you are keeping. When you have been through everything in your pile, neatly re-pack your bedside table and cupboard.

What about other people's clutter?

There is one rule: don't touch it! I know this can be extremely difficult if you share your space with someone else, and I can just hear you yelling, 'But Kate, what about their side of the bed?' One of my clients had a very small bedroom. Above the bed was a pelmet littered with files, papers, books and CDs – all threatening to topple onto her and her husband. Reluctantly, she followed the rule and cleared only her bedside table and her half of the shelf above their bed. Within about four days, hubby got the picture and cleared his side, too.

Remember that energising music can make the bedside challenge – and de-cluttering in general – an enjoyable, invigorating experience.

In the next issue Kate will share her four-point plan to de-clutter your email inbox in one week.