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Spring Cleaning: Decluttering Your House is Just the Start

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By: Tonya Pendleton, BlackAmericaWeb.com

If you're like most of America, there are probably more than a few things that you could throw out. Let's be real, black people: We've all gone to someone's house that is so filled with figurines or junk and clutter that we hate being there for too long. Don't act like that's not your house! If you have no room to buy anything else because there's just nowhere to put it, or if your two-car garage has no room left to park one, let alone, two cars, then you're the culprit.

Shows like The Style Channel's "Clean House" starring our favorite flower girl Niecy Nash, and TLC's "Clean Sweep" with Oprah Winfrey favorite Peter Walsh help families understand that when there's clutter in their homes, cars, garages or offices, it often spills over into their lives as well. Spring is historically a great time to get rid of the clutter, and there's a practical reason for that.

"Spring cleaning is an age-old tradition that dates back to the early nineteenth century," says Tania Hall of 1-800-GOT-JUNK. "Before the days of electricity, American homes were lit and heated by candles and fireplaces, and by winter's end would become so covered in soot and dust that a top-to-bottom house clean was needed."

These days, cluttered homes are more likely due to the acquisition of too many possessions. New York City-based professional organizer Forrest Huguenin says he sees the results of over-buying every day in the cluttered clients he services. Huguenin says that clutter is more than unsightly and embarrassing. It can actually cost in serious ways - peace of mind, time and money.

"One way that clutter costs you - you end up buying things that you already have. You end up double spending on food items that you think that you don't have, but are just buried in your pantry," he said. "Clutter is something that invades your mental state also. To illustrate, if you're away on vacation, and you stick that card key in the door and you come into that neat, perfect hotel room, what is the feeling that you have? Contrast that to coming home, especially after a hard day at work, and things are thrown everywhere. It actually affects your mood. The clutter and confusion in your environment causes clutter and confusion in your mind."

Black people may be more prone to clutter than others, organization experts say. Black women (you know who you are!) are notorious for clothing clutter, jamming already overstuffed closets to the limit by buying things that they don't need and don't wear. But black people from all income backgrounds can have a hard time parting with material things.

"We tend to put a lot of stock in possessions," says Charlotte, North Carolina-based life coach Karyn Beach. "Coming from a background where you didn't have anything or you had to fight hard to get it, you don't want to part with it. You paid a lot for it. You paid a lot for that Coach bag, even though you're not using it. It represents something, and we hold onto things a lot longer than we should."

Clutter can literally take over your life. If you can't pay bills because you



Need help decluttering your home? TV shows like 'Clean House' with Niecy Nash are a great start. (AP)

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..... intended; you may be losing money when you can't find what - or don't even know what - you've stored in there.

And sorry, clearing things out only to then transfer them to a storage unit is a no-no. Why? Because the idea of clutter is to get rid of things that you don't use now and probably won't ever use, not to mention it just becomes another bill.

"Storage is just another excuse to hold on to things that you don't really need," says Huguenin. "The money you're spending on storage is just keeping you from spending on better things like retirement savings, investing, or paying down debt. The attachment to these things is just in your mind."

While there are hard cases - folks who just can't admit or are in denial about their clutter issues - Huguenin says clutter victims usually know who they are. He suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I spend several minutes each day looking for my keys, phone or other important things?
- Do I incur late fees or overdraft fees, a sign or financial clutter?
- Do I frequently feel rushed or short of time, a sign of time clutter?
- When company is coming over, do I have to rush around picking up clutter?

Beach says that what most people don't realize in holding onto things too tightly is that they are actually becoming stagnant and blocking their future blessings. When you're hell-bent to keep things you have - whether you're using them or not - you don't allow for anything new to come into your life.

"When you get rid of the old, you make room for the new," Beach says. "If there's something that has a lot of sentimental value to you, then don't get rid of it, but get rid of everything else because you want to make room for the new."

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