

Make the year ahead clutter-free

Many people feel the dawn of a new year provides an opportunity to clean the slate and begin anew. That notion can be applied in various ways, including around the house.

Cleaning the slate at home may involve reducing clutter around the house. Clutter can gradually overtake a home's interior, turning a once pristine home into one overwhelmed with nonessential items. Clearing a home of clutter can seem like a monumental task, but the following tips can help homeowners and apartment dwellers make the year ahead clutter-free.

- **Scan important documents and save them on a computer.** Some documents cannot be discarded, but that does not mean they have to be stored in bulky file cabinets or desk drawers. Scan important documents such as medical receipts or tax returns and save them on your computer where they won't take up any physical space. Purchase an external hard drive as a safety net where you can store backups of important documents in case a computer crashes and cannot be rebooted.

- **Thin out DVD and CD libraries.** Thanks to streaming services and digital music play-

ers, DVDs and compact discs have become somewhat obsolete. Discard or donate DVDs that you can just as easily stream through your television, and convert compact discs to digital files that you can play on your computer and MP3 players, ultimately donating the discs and clearing space.

- **Purchase furniture that doubles as storage.** Storage ottomans and benches can help clear common areas and bedrooms of clutter such as blankets and bed linens that can make rooms feel more claustrophobic. Storage furniture might not get excess items out of the house, but such furnishings can create a more comfortable, welcoming environment.

- **Switch to e-statements for bank documents and utility bills.** Paper is a big contributor to household clutter. That's still the case even though many adults now pay the majority of their bills online. When given the chance to choose between paper or e-statements, opt for the latter so bills and bank statements don't pile up on your desk or throughout your home office. If you still want to keep important bills and bank statements, download them to

your computer and keep them in a designated folder on your desktop.

- **Adopt an "out with the old, in with the new" mantra.**

Resolve to discard old items after purchasing new ones or receiving birthday or holiday gifts. Hanging on to old items because they can still function and serve some utility is a recipe for a cluttered home. Anytime you or a family member brings a new item into your home, make sure the item it's replacing finds its way out the door.



Opting for e-statements instead of paper statements can help men and women reduce clutter around the house.

Clearing clutter is a goal for many people at the dawn of a new year. As intimidating as clutter can seem, discarding it is easier than it may appear.

New Year's Eve safety tips



New Year's Eve is one of the most festive nights of the year. Many people spend the final moments of the year celebrating with family and friends. As joyous as such celebrations tend to be, it's important that New Year's revelers keep certain safety precautions in mind when celebrating the end of one year and the dawn of the next.

- **Arrange for transportation in advance.** According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an average of 304 people die in drunk-driving crashes in the days surrounding Christmas and New Year's

Eve each year. Before heading out on New Year's Eve, celebrants should ensure their safety by arranging for transportation to and from the festivities. Choose a designated driver to drive throughout the night, or agree to utilize a taxi or shuttle service if everyone plans to consume alcohol. Men and women who volunteer to be designated drivers should be especially alert on the roadways, preparing to drive in potentially inclement weather and being on the lookout for fellow motorists who might be driving erratically. If possible, take public transportation to and from the festivities so no one is tempted to drive after consuming alcohol.

- **Pick a meet-up spot in case anyone gets separated from the group.** New Year's Eve celebrations in public places such as bars, clubs or town squares tend to become crowded as mid-

night draws near. It's easy for groups of friends or family to be separated, so choose a meet-up spot where everyone can gather after the ball drops. Choose a spot that's well lit and easily accessible to all, and confirm the location of the meet-up spot via a group text message before heading out for the night.

- **Stay sober.** Many people feel pressured to overindulge with alcohol on New Year's Eve, but men and women should be responsible with regard to their alcohol consumption. Overconsumption of alcohol makes it difficult for men and women to stay alert, and that loss of alertness can be difficult to manage on nights as hectic as New Year's Eve. While it's acceptable for men and women of legal drinking age to raise a glass of champagne at midnight, it's best to limit alcohol consumption throughout the festivities so the party is memorable for all the right reasons.

- **Be a responsible host.** When hosting a New Year's Eve party, hosts must prioritize the safety of their guests. Make sure guests don't drink too much, which can leave hosts open to criminal or civil action should guests leave their home and cause an accident. Serve plenty of

food and nonalcoholic beverages so guests who are drinking have something in their systems other than alcohol. Schedule things to do throughout the night so guests have more to do than drink alcohol. In addition, make room for potential overnight guests should someone be incapable of driving home at the end of the night. Keep contact information for local taxis or shuttle services readily available so guests know they don't have to drive themselves home.

New Year's Eve is a festive night, but one where safety needs to be as big a priority as having a good time.



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