

SIMPLIFY Your Life



BY JANET SPENCER KING

illustrations by Elwood H. Smith

2007, with its promise of new beginnings, lies just ahead. Why not make a special resolution for the coming year? Simplify your life. We asked experts for some shortcuts to minor restructuring of attitude and environment that promise great payoffs.

Bernstein's 4 rules for beating clutter

"Life is not tidy," a friend used to tell me, and for many people, neither is the house. But having to make your way around clutter robs you of time, zaps your energy, and can even be downright dangerous. Getting organized is easier than most people think, says professional organization expert, Cindy Bernstein, who used to work in the Society's Maryland Chapter, and who now runs AIM 4 ORDER (www.aim4order.com), a professional organizing service.

Here are Bernstein's rules:

- **Get rid of a little bit every day.** Set a timer for 10 or 15 minutes once a day and during that time sort clutter into one of three piles—a give-away, a throw-away and a to-keep pile. Decide by asking yourself: Do I love it? Do I use it? Do I think it's beautiful? Unless the item gets at least one yes answer, it needs to go. Trash it or give it a second life by donating it to a charity.

- **Create a mail station and tend it daily.** Your station needs files for each family member's mail, a box for recycled paper, and a trash basket for junk mail. When you bring the mail in, go through it immediately, filing, recycling, or tossing. Make it a family rule to clear all mail files before bedtime.

- **Cluster items for specific chores.** Examples: group all your gift-wrapping materials, bills to be paid, make-up or grooming items, plastic wrap and paper/plastic bags. Stash

them where they are used. Avoid extra steps by getting duplicates of frequently used items, such as scissors or tape.

- **Store stuff in easy-to-use organizers.** Examples: Lazy Susans and pull-out shelves in the kitchen, clear container boxes for belts, socks, and other accessories in the closets, binders with clear slide-in packets for medical and insurance records for your desk, baskets for hair care items—well, you get the idea.

While you're at it, Bernstein said, be sure to create a special place where you can read, think, listen to music, or just be. Make it serene with a comfy chair, soft colors, and flowers.

Gackle's 5 must-have gadgets

We live in a culture of gadgets. They serve a bevy of purposes and can make life tasks smoother for people with MS. Occupational therapist Cindy Gackle, of the University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview, has observed five that are particularly helpful. She cautions, though, to try gadgets before purchasing. Decide what meets your needs, what you are comfortable using, and what you really like.

Here is Gackle's list:

- **Remote appliance control.** Relax in your easy chair while you turn on lights and appliances throughout the home with the touch of your finger. The amazing little remote appliance control comes in simple-to-use, inexpensive models or



more complex and costly ones for the electronic minded. Radio Shack (www.radioshack.com) has a good assortment or visit Smarthome.com.

■ **Voice recorders.** Easy to carry and perfect to quickly record reminders in your own voice, including grocery lists, address and phone numbers, upcoming appointments, and even where you parked in that super-sized lot. Digital recorders, which can range in price from \$10 to \$100, allow you to locate a specific message in a flash. Also available at Radio Shack.

■ **Reachers.** They are now available starting under \$20 in numerous styles and lengths to meet a plethora of needs in the kitchen, the bedroom, and everywhere else. There are reachers with pincer or whole-hand grasps. Some have magnets or suction cups. Some are lighter, some are longer; all are useful. Check at large drug stores such as Walgreens or ask your Society chapter if they have catalogs.

■ **Elastic shoelaces.** With these shoelaces (plain or coiled), you slip into shoes that are already tied. Hint: thread the laces through while your feet are in the shoes to ensure proper tension. If you're using plain laces, once you've determined that they're providing adequate support and are easy to slip on and off, tie a knot in them before tying the bow. (Coiled laces don't need to be tied.)

■ **One-hand laundry hampers.** No

Warren's 4 tips for eye ease

People with MS often dim the lights because of light sensitivity, but that may complicate your life, said occupational therapist and low-vision specialist, Mary Warren, MS, OTR/L, SCLV, at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. To ease your eyes, try her tips instead:

■ **Eliminate background patterns.**

Floral patterns, landscape backgrounds, or checks make it harder to differentiate objects. Opt instead for solid colors for table coverings, rugs, and walls.

■ **Increase contrast.** Put yellow tape strips on black phones and dark beverages in white cups. Choose contrasting colors for door trims and steps.

■ **Reduce glare.** Halogen bulbs, preferably full-spectrum ones, are slightly more expensive than regular bulbs, but give glare-free light. Install mini-blinds on windows that admit direct sunlight. Consider a UV filter for your eyeglasses. (See a vision specialist to select the right filter for you.)

■ **Look to enlarge.** Shop for items in larger formats, including telephone key pads, calendars, playing cards, newspapers, and even puzzles. Your chapter can recommend catalog sources.



need to lug around a basket—these mesh hampers are easy to tote, even on steps. Available at local housewares stores or at eBay or Amazon (under \$10).

To review a wide selection of these and many other gadgets, Gackle recommends www.youcantoocan.com.

Rintell's 5 steps to cooperative kids

At some point when doing chores, parents say to themselves, "Hey, the kids are ... old enough." And according to psychologist David Rintell, EdD, of the Partners MS Center in Boston, who has long worked with families dealing with MS, children benefit from having appropriate chores in the home. It gives them, he said, "a sense of accomplishment and being an active part of the family." But as many parents can attest, getting the kids to agree can be a challenge. Here are Dr. Rintell's steps to peaceful chore cooperation.

■ **Discuss the subject with your spouse first.** Parents often have different expectations about chores for children, Dr. Rintell said. They should sort them out ahead of time to be on the same page before they approach the children.

■ **Talk with the kids in a calm atmosphere and in an upbeat way.** Treat this as a compliment, not as a burden. Explain to the kids that they are now old enough and responsible enough to help out in the

family. There is no need to tie this to MS or to any other problem in the family, Dr. Rintell said. This is simply a better way for a family to function.

■ **Include the children's ideas.** Ask for their thoughts about how to, say, reduce evening clutter, and what chores they might like to take on. Remember, though, that children mature at different rates and a child may not be ready for a complex task. Which leads to the next step.

■ **Have a review process.** Hold another "meeting" in a few weeks or a month. Go over all the assignments to discuss how they are working out. Ask if the children want to modify their list.

■ **Look to praise, not criticize.** Watch for when a chore is well done and praise that accomplishment rather than carping when the work is sloppy. Creating good feelings helps make for more cooperative—and happier—kids.

By the way, these steps probably work between adult members of a household too. It can be hard for a person with MS to be upbeat about sharing—or giving away—a household job they used to do without much stress. But in the end, sharing chores can help the whole family live with MS more easily. ■

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