

AMICA

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

THE SMART SENIOR'S GUIDE TO DOWNSIZING

How to decide what you truly need to be happy and let go of the rest

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THE JOY OF DOWNSIZING

Once upon a time, beautifully styled rooms in magazines and on TV made us believe the path to happiness lay in organizing our belongings with the right shelves and baskets.

Today's gurus believe the key to contentment lies not in organizing but in keeping anything we find useful or meaningful and letting go of the rest. By downsizing thoughtfully, we'll live surrounded by things we love, and define ourselves in more important ways than by our possessions. Use this guide to find downsizing tips from experts around the world.

Marie Kondo

Time Magazine named the Japanese professional organizer as one of the world's most influential people for showing us the joy of decluttering in *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. In 2019, Netflix brought her into our homes in the popular series *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo*.

Margareta Magnusson

From Europe came the sensible yet humorous voice of grandmother Margareta Magnusson. In her best-seller *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning: How to Free Yourself and Your Family from a Lifetime of Clutter*, Magnusson believes in minimizing as a thoughtful process,

not a sad one. "Remember, it's as much about letting you peacefully recall a lifetime of fond memories as it is about being considerate to those you leave behind."

The Minimalists

Deciding what to keep after his mother died was profound for Joshua Fields Millburn, co-founder with Ryan Nicodemus of The Minimalists. Among his valuable lessons: "I am not my stuff: we are more than our possessions. Our memories are within us, not within our things. Holding onto stuff imprisons us; letting go is freeing." In the end, he kept just four boxes of photos. "I don't need Mom's stuff — there are traces of her everywhere: in the way I act, in the way I treat others, even in the way I smile. She's still there, and she was never part of her stuff."

No matter why you're downsizing, these experts can help you reduce your belongings, from clothing and books to furniture and sentimental objects. We can't promise it'll be easy, but we can guarantee fresh advice — and we hope you enjoy what you keep even more.



HOW TO DOWNSIZE YOUR FURNITURE

Select your favourite pieces that will fit your new lifestyle and space

Margareta Magnusson recommends tidying up by clearing out large items in your home first, so let's start with furniture.

Keep the keepers

Some people organize by picking out the stuff they don't want and packing the rest. Instead, focus on the new life you're beginning and think about the furniture you'd like to take with you. Think about what you'll be doing in your new lifestyle and what you'll need.

Eliminate rooms you don't have to furnish

If you're downsizing from a house to a one- or two-bedroom suite or condo, chances are you may not have a garage, office or guest room to furnish. Most of your belongings in those rooms can be sold, donated or given away.

Envision your new space

Get accurate dimensions of each room in your new place, as well as the placement of fixed elements like doorways and windows. Then, make a floor plan (try a whiteboard, magnetic board or a large sheet of paper). Make scaled-down cardboard cutouts to represent your favourite furniture pieces and

move items around in the floor plan to see how they'll fit. It might help to visit your new residence again before the move to help you visualize everything coming together.

Think about scale

If you're accustomed to generously proportioned furniture to fit a large suburban home, and your new space isn't quite so large, you might find yourself more comfortable scaling down to your most compact armchairs and tables. If your large coffee table feels cramped in your new suite, bring an end table or two instead.

Bring accessories and art

Even if your furniture won't all fit, you can always decorate with a few of your favourite toss pillows, throw blankets, lamps and paintings or photographs. Start by thinking about which ones will work on the walls of your new space, taking into account the wall space, furniture placement, windows, etc. If space permits, select your best-loved medium-size or large pieces (or a grouping of smaller frames) to hang above larger furniture such as your headboard, a sofa or loveseat, dresser, etc. Smaller pieces work well in tight spaces, such as hung above or placed on a side table, on the wall of the bathroom, etc.



Manage expectations about selling

Family and friends may appreciate a gift of furniture or accessories you no longer need. For remaining high-end pieces or sought-after antiques, consider selling to a consignment shop or hiring a firm to run an estate sale. Be realistic about what you can expect to earn, no matter how much you originally paid: We tend to overvalue what we have, while forgetting that styles and tastes change. You may have an easier time unloading good quality office furniture and power tools than old sofas or mattresses. Find more tips on where to donate or sell your things on page 7.

PARING DOWN YOUR WARDROBE

Getting dressed is a joy when you love everything in your closet

Most people start downsizing by tackling a room. Marie Kondo, a world-renowned professional organizer, has a better idea: tidy up by category, not by location. Her goal is to leave her clients living with items they absolutely love; clothing is an easy way to begin exploring what adds value to your life before you progress to more emotionally loaded categories. Here's how to downsize your clothes using tips from Kondo, Swedish author Margareta Magnusson and The Minimalists' Joshua Fields Millburn.

Gather your clothing in one place

Remove your clothes and footwear from every closet and drawer and pile everything on your bed. You'll quickly become aware of how much you own.

Ask yourself, "Does this spark joy?"

Kondo suggests asking her famous question while picking up every article of clothing, one-by-one. If you answer "Yes," you keep it. If not, she suggests you thank the item for its service and discard it (see page 7 for tips on giving items away). The point is to end up with a wardrobe where everything serves a purpose and brings you a feeling of happiness.

Show gratitude before tossing

While it may seem silly, Kondo teaches her clients to thank an item for its service before discarding it. This is especially important for things that you associate with strong memories — letting go can be easier if you say goodbye with a heartfelt thanks.

What if you're not sure?

Try to frame your decisions as a yes or no (or a need versus a want) to eliminate maybes. Kondo suggests asking yourself, "Do I want to take this into the future?" If Millburn isn't certain, he wears the item in the next week. If it's not a favourite after that, he donates it. If decisiveness isn't your strength, ask an unsentimental friend to help; you don't want nostalgic relatives getting attached to everything just as you're honing your own sense of what makes you happy. If you can't figure out why an item has meaning or why you kept it, toss it.

Adopt a uniform

Magnusson's trick for an attractive minimalist closet is to pare down your personal style and give away random garments. If you always find yourself in grey pants with a blue shirt, embrace it. As she says, "All garments should look good together and you should be able to mix and exchange them with one another."

Let go of emotional baggage

Will keeping items that are too small inspire you to change your diet and start exercising, or will they make you feel guilty for not losing weight? If you're holding onto something you never wear because it was expensive, it's time to acknowledge that this item is actually weighing you down, not lifting you up. Let it go by selling it to a consignment shop or giving it to someone who'll appreciate it.

Try the 20-20 Rule for "just in case" items

Tempted to hold on to something nonessential for "someday?" The Minimalists get rid of anything that they can replace for less than \$20 in less than 20 minutes from their location. Although they've rarely had to replace an item they'd previously tossed, (less than five times for the two combined), it's been easy and affordable every time.



SORTING A LIFETIME OF BOOKS

Create a perfect library from your favourite books



Before he started living simply, Joshua Fields Millburn once owned more than 2,000 books. Some he'd read, others he'd planned to read eventually. He sold or donated almost every one upon realizing that his collection — from literary fiction and photography to his late father's medical journals — had become a part of his identity: He thought the books made him look important and intelligent. "What's worse," says Millburn, in an essay, "I thought these books made me somebody." Not wanting to be owned by his possessions, he kept one shelf and bought a Kindle. The minimalist no longer owns piles of books, yet he reads

about one electronic book a week. Here's how to downsize your library to a collection you absolutely love.

Set a reasonable boundary

Marie Kondo lives in a humid climate that destroys paper, so she limits herself to a "Hall of Fame" collection of 30 beloved books she feels connected to, including childhood favourites and titles that inspired her work. Setting a limit — perhaps determined by the space you can realistically devote to storing books — helps you decide which books actually add value to your life. Plus, you can always adjust later.

If you can't imagine tossing a single book, that's important. The point of minimizing is to figure out what you hold most important. If every book truly brings that much meaning to your life, and you have space, then keep them all.

Someday usually means never

Review every book to see if it makes you feel excited to take it into your new home, or guilty for letting it collect dust. If you haven't read a book yet, Kondo suggests the purpose of that book was to teach you that you didn't need it. Most of us simply don't re-read books, either.

Put cookbooks on the back burner

If you're moving to Amica, you'll have daily meals prepared by a professional chef. Before you give away cookbooks, take digital photos of prized recipes you can make in the residence's craft kitchen.

Make peace with getting rid of books

Remember giving up old ones doesn't mean giving up reading or the pursuit of knowledge. Yes, reading books adds value to your life but your collection isn't who you are. The experience of reading is what enriches our lives, not the books themselves. Plus, purging makes room for new books (get ideas for what to do with books you're not keeping on page 7).

Let go of scarcity

What happens if you give away a book that you later find yourself wanting? You can likely find it online, at the library or at a bookstore without much expense or effort.

HOW TO MINIMIZE PAPERWORK

Some paper is practical, some is essential, most is unnecessary

Marie Kondo is toughest on the next category she recommends tackling when you're downsizing — paperwork: "My basic principle for sorting papers is to throw them all away." She doesn't literally mean everything, but she doesn't support wasting limited space storing something that brings as little joy as the paperwork we're required to keep. Here are some tips for slimming down bloated files.

Collect all paperwork in one place

This means everything from financial and legal documents to instruction manuals, greeting cards, coupons and receipts. Save sentimental papers (letters, photos etc.) for another time.

Sort everything into three piles

The first is for **paper that requires attention** (bills to be paid, forms to fill out). Sign up for ebills and automatic payments to minimize unnecessary paper; after paying, you can shred bills you won't need for your tax return. The second pile is for **short-term paperwork** (such as tax documents for the current year, warranties, etc.). Finally, you'll need a spot for **papers needed forever** (wills, birth

certificates, mortgage, etc.). One of your piles might be light enough to fit in a single folder; for others, you may need an accordion file or the drawer of a filing cabinet.

Categorize your "short-term" files

Short-term might be a stretch when we're talking about tax-related files, since Revenue Canada suggests keeping these documents for up to seven years after filing. You can get rid of anything older.

Let go of unnecessary receipts

Do you track every expenditure to manage your budget? Put those in the "requires attention" folder, then toss after you've entered the numbers. Do you often return items because you change your mind about purchases? The process of identifying what's important to you might help you shop more decisively going forward. File receipts for big-ticket items with your warranties.

Centralize important documents

If something happens, it'll save your family a lot of trouble if they know where to look for all your essential info. Create a list so they know how to access your accounts (bank, credit cards, investments, retirement funds, etc.). Share info about any outstanding debts,



recent tax return, will, life insurance policies, identity documents (certificates for birth, marriage/divorce, social insurance number, etc.) as well as important passwords for your computer or accounts. Include contact info for your professionals, such as your doctor, lawyer or financial adviser. Store it in a safe place, such as a safety deposit box.

LETTING GO OF SENTIMENTAL ITEMS

What to do about photographs, gifts, letters and other mementoes

Minimalists agree on one thing: It can be the most challenging to part with items carrying sentimental value. Sort mundane items like clothing and books before you start to unbox letters, photographs and keepsakes. Here's what to think about as you're downsizing mementoes.

Ask, “Will anyone be happier if I save this?”

Keep Swedish author Margareta Magnusson's key question in mind as you're sorting. Is the item really that important to you? Or is it just unnecessary clutter your family will have to deal with?

Know when to get rid of gifts

You're likely holding onto gifts even though they don't enrich your life. Professional organizer Marie Kondo says it's time to thank the item for the happiness it brought when it was first offered, and then let it go guilt-free. “The true purpose of a present is to be received, because gifts are a means for conveying someone's feelings for you.”

Sort photos wisely

Go through every photo and decide which ones spark joy for you. Throw out any duplicates or images of people you can't name. If two photos are similar, pick the one you like best and toss the other. Organize miscellaneous photos by year, by event, or both. Magnusson was able to thoughtfully regift excess photos by creating individual albums for various family members.

Keep fewer pictures but enjoy them more

Does it make you feel happy to own boxes of photos you never see? The Minimalists' Joshua Fields Millburn scanned his favourites from his late mother's home (invest in a scanner that makes the job relatively quick and easy), then tossed them. Now these cherished memories are digital, kept in electronic picture frames that display images like a slideshow, and he can enjoy them every day. These images can be easily printed if anyone wants a copy and can't be lost in a fire.

Review cherished letters

Take time to read old correspondence that brings you joy. If the letters reveal interesting family history, consider giving them away or inviting relatives to look at them to pass these stories down. If you unearth a dusty box of old birthday cards and reviewing them feels like a chore instead of a pleasure, feel free to recycle. The cards likely brought joy once upon a time; it's OK to let them go now.



Box up your personal mementoes

Maybe you're not ready to part with a love letter from your high school crush or your first stuffed toy. Put them all in a box, label it “Mementoes” and let your family know they can toss this box containing nothing of monetary value after you're gone. Destroy private items, such as diaries or other secrets, that could create family tension.

WHAT TO DO WITH UNWANTED GOODS

How to get rid of unwanted clothing, books and more

Sell, sell, sell. If you've got lots of energy and you'd like to cash in on downsizing items of value, you might enjoy organizing a yard sale, bringing items to a community rummage sale or listing items for sale on Kijiji or another online classified service. If you have numerous valuable or in-demand items, consider hiring a professional to run an estate sale on your behalf.

Give to a consignment shop

This works best if you have high-quality jewelry, accessories, clothing or antiques, but not enough to merit an estate sale. Look for local shops that accept items on consignment: if the store finds a buyer, you collect a portion of the selling price.

Donate to those in need

Many charities will send a truck to your house if you call to schedule a pickup of unwanted clothes or household goods (try programs run by Diabetes Canada or the Kidney Foundation, for example). Places such as Furniture Bank or Habitat for Humanity's Restore accept donations of selected furniture and appliances in good used condition. Salvation Army, Goodwill or Value Village will likely take books, clothing, etc.

Regift to family and friends

Maybe you don't want to donate something you no longer want. Consider offering your possessions (china, silver, books, antiques, etc.) to loved ones, especially if the item will make them happy.

However, don't be surprised if you're the only one attached to a keepsake. Margareta Magnusson assumed her kids would want the kitchen table where they'd long ago raced their spoons in imaginary regattas. When she offered it, they all said no (though one eventually took it.)

Host a swap party

Plan an evening with friends and family at the end of your downsizing journey and invite them to take home your unwanted clothing, books, accessories or kitchen items. Think of it as a chance to socialize while you downsize.

Give books away thoughtfully

If you're not keen on recycling unwanted books, you can donate them. Keep a box at the front door and invite visiting friends and family to help themselves to a volume or two when they leave. Used bookstores might buy some of your books, or try giving them to schools or public libraries where they may be sold to raise money for programs and services. Finally, look in your neighbourhood for Little

Free Libraries, book-sharing boxes sprouting in the front yards of book lovers across the country. Feel free to add yours to the collection knowing they'll be enjoyed by the next person who stops by looking for a great read.

