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Help for Hoarders:

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Are You...

... a Hoarder?

Hoarding is the compulsive purchasing, acquiring, searching, and saving of items that have little or no value. The behavior usually has disastrous effects — emotional, physical, social, financial, even legal — for a hoarder and family members.



The descriptions below are typical of someone who hoards:

- Avoids throwing away possessions (common hoarded items are newspapers, magazines, paper and plastic bags, cardboard boxes, photographs, household supplies, food and clothing)
- Experiences severe anxiety about discarding possessions
- Has trouble making decisions about organizing possessions
- Feels overwhelmed or embarrassed by possessions
- Is suspicious of other people touching possessions
- Has obsessive thoughts about possessions, like fear of running out of an item and needing it later or checking the garbage to see if an item was accidentally discarded
- May have functional impairments including loss of living space inside the home (no place to eat, sleep, or cook), social isolation, family or marital problems, financial difficulties or health hazards

People hoard for many reasons, among them the belief that their possessions will be useful or valuable in the future, have sentimental value, are unique and irreplaceable, or because if they cannot decide where something goes, it's better just to keep it.

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Hoarding vs. Collecting

Hoarding is not the same as collecting. In general, collectors have a sense of pride about their possessions, and they experience joy in displaying and talking about their possessions. They keep their collection organized, feel satisfaction adding to it, and budget their time and money.

Hoarders generally experience embarrassment about their possessions and feel uncomfortable when others see them. Their clutter often takes over functional living space, and they feel sad or ashamed after acquiring additional items. Also, they often incur great debt, sometimes extreme.

Effective treatment is available from qualified mental health professionals, who can also help the affected family members.

Helping Hoarders Help Themselves...

1. Acknowledge and identify the problem.
2. Tell people about your problem and ask others for help.
3. Identify an area in your home to clear. This could be a box, a cupboard, your car, or even a whole room. Small, achievable goals will help you to recognize the progress you are making.
4. Work on that one area consistently - at least once every day for a minimum of 15 minutes.
5. Make a decision within 10-20 seconds about whether or not to keep an item.
6. Moving things around to different areas within your home is termed "churning" and doesn't help to reduce the number of possessions in your home. It is better to let them go to a new location.
7. Remember, there is no need keep things for other people or for "when" the house is clear.
8. Create a timetable, and commit to it.
9. Recognize what you have achieved – take "before and after" photographs, which will give you a real sense of pride as you progress.
10. Take personal responsibility for your progress rather wanting others to do it for you.
11. Set rules in advance for your helpers, such as the final decision about all objects is yours.
12. Remember that the bad feelings you experience when letting items go only last for a short while.
13. You can be free from the responsibility of finding homes for every item you possess.
14. Ask for support from friends to take things away immediately, which reduces the risk to keep things.
15. Be conscious and aware of situations when you might be tempted to acquire more items.

