

# 12 Tips to Overcome Hoarding

Hoarding can take years to overcome, says Dr. David Tolin, director of the Anxiety Disorders Center at the Institute of Living at Hartford Hospital. He offers these tips to those who may be feeling overwhelmed by the task of cleaning their homes.

## **1. Not being able to think of a use for an object doesn't mean you need to keep it.**

Dr. David Tolin suggests: "The question to ask yourself is not whether you *can* use the object, but whether you really *will* use the object. A good rule of thumb is that if you haven't used an object in over a year—say, you didn't even know it was there until you found it on the bottom of a pile—you probably can live without it."

## **2. More is not necessarily better.**

"There's really no need for most of us to have, say, two microwave ovens, or three bicycles," Dr. Tolin says. "Try to get rid of the extras."

## **3. Categorize items into piles.**

For example, you might make a pile of things to keep, a pile of things to donate to charity, a pile of things to sell or give away and a pile of things to throw away. "Don't make too many piles," Dr. Tolin says. "Having to decide among 10 piles just slows you down and strains your thought processes."

## **4. Don't overthink.**

"If you have to go through a long and complicated decision-making process for each and every item before you get rid of it, you'll never get free of the clutter," Dr. Tolin says. "Most decisions are not that complicated. If you find that the decision takes you more than a couple of minutes for a particular object, you are probably making it too complicated."

## **5. Learn to get past some of the imperfections—it's okay to make mistakes.**

"You don't have to do a *perfect* job," Dr. Tolin says. "Just a *good enough* job."

## **6. Follow the "OHIO" rule: Only handle it once.**

"If you pick something up, make a decision about it and then put it somewhere it belongs," Dr. Tolin says.

"If you find yourself handling things again and again, moving things from one pile to another, stop yourself. Refocus and move on."

#### **7. Be brave.**

"Beating compulsive hoarding requires you to face things that are very scary," Dr. Tolin says. "I can't tell you not to be scared, because you can't really control that. But you can be brave. Be willing to face your fears. Be willing to risk making the wrong decision. The people who gain the most are usually the people who are willing to risk the most."

#### **8. Understand what you're afraid of, and recognize when your fears are irrational.**

"Ask yourself: What's the worst that can happen if I throw this out? And how bad would that really be? If you're not sure whether your fear is irrational, try an experiment. Try making a specific prediction about what will happen if you discard an object. Then discard it, and really look to see whether that bad thing happened."

#### **9. Be patient.**

"No one is going to overcome compulsive hoarding overnight. This is a time-consuming process," Dr. Tolin says. "So people with hoarding problems, and their friends and family members too, need to focus on small victories. If you cleaned a room out, congratulate yourself, rather than get down on yourself for the rooms you haven't cleaned yet."

#### **10. Keep the ball rolling.**

Clean things as they come along, before they become overwhelming problems. "Once you've started, don't stop, even for a day," Dr. Tolin says. "If all you can do is five minutes a day, fine. But do it."

#### **11. Be strict with yourself.**

"When we were kids, our moms told us that we couldn't have dessert until we ate our veggies," Dr. Tolin says. "The same rule applies here. If you like watching TV, then promise yourself that you can only watch an hour of TV *after* you've cleaned for an hour."

#### **12. Know when to ask for help.**

"Compulsive hoarding is a potentially serious mental health issue," Dr. Tolin says. "Serious mental health issues require serious treatment. If you can do it on your own, great. But if you can't, get help from someone who is experienced in the treatment of compulsive hoarding."

*Some of this information was adapted by Dr. David Tolin from Steketee & Frost (2003), Clinical Psychology Review, 23, 905-927.*

Read more: <https://www.oprah.com/home/how-to-overcome-hoarding/all#ixzz5jJ1ICCjM>