



News Stories

It's time to clean out the cupboards and closets and dust off the blinds and bookshelves; spring is almost here. With the transition of seasons, many people partake in the annual tradition of spring cleaning, the activity of cleaning and organizing your house from top to bottom.

Do you question if that trunk filled with treasures (read: old clothes) is really trash? What about the storage room that is stacked with...stuff?

During your spring-cleaning routine if you are wondering if what you are holding onto may be an issue or is turning into an obsessive-compulsive disorder, commonly referred to as hoarding, Beaumont psychiatrist, Howard Belkin, M.D., explains this behavior and offers some warning signs.

"Hoarding is not a specific psychiatric diagnosis. It is, in general, thought of as a type of compulsive behavior or a variation of obsessive-compulsive disorder or another anxiety disorder," says Dr. Belkin.

A hoarder is usually emotionally attached to the objects collected and may have a difficult time showing them to others, often out of the fear that an outside person may attempt to steal or throw away some of their collection. They often feel a loss of control when they consider discarding their treasures.

A few warning signs of hoarding behavior include:

- having a very cluttered living space with a large number of possessions of limited value
- hesitancy to return borrowed items
- unrealistic plans to sort through or thin out a collection that never materialize

"People with this disorder do not see the hoarding behavior as a problem," says Dr. Belkin. "A hoarder generally feels that others do not understand the significance of the objects collected or the extent to which they 'matter' to them," he explains.

Dr. Belkin says there are also certain personality characteristics that may indicate if a person is at risk of becoming a hoarder, including:

- loners with little outside interactions
- those with an overall compulsive nature with relationship difficulties
- individuals who have family members, but never allow them to visit their homes
- people with poor insight, perfectionist personalities, indecisiveness and difficulties making what most people consider simple and basic life decisions

“They are often unmarried as they may feel that they will lose a part of themselves, their past or lives of loved ones,” says Dr. Belkin.

If you are motivated to clean out the clutter and toss or donate unused objects this spring, chances are you simply need time to do some deep cleaning and organizing. You can throw out the idea that you may be a hoarder and enjoy the new season.

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