



Crushing the clutterbug

Lisa van de Geyn

Tanya Bell* is a self-confessed pack rat. Aside from her new husband, two dogs and a cat, the 39-year-old Mississauga, Ont.-based marketing coordinator lives in a small townhouse with a ton of stuff she can't bear to part with: programs from every concert she's ever attended, tickets from sporting events that date back to the 70s, her childhood stuffed animals and more than 750 copies of *Sports Illustrated* magazine. "My husband calls all the stuff in our house a nightmare. I call it somewhat comforting," Bell admits. "I've become so oblivious to it that I don't even realize how bad it actually is."

Here's where things get even messier: a recent study

commissioned by the Professional Organizers of Canada found that Bell is just one of the millions of Canadians who lead a cluttered life; 80% of us are disorganized in some way, with most admitting that their home and workspace are in a state of disarray. In addition, 35% of us have tried to make a dent in our messes but have been unsuccessful.

Sure, clutter is annoying (no one likes looking for missing keys in the morning or closets so jam-packed that stuff explodes every time you open the door), but it can also pose several health problems. Clutterbugs are susceptible to stress, depression, asthma and obesity.

WHAT IT IS

Got too much stuff lying around? So disorganized that there's always a mess in your way? If your clutter can't be defined as circumstantial (for example, your house is untidy because you've recently moved), you might be a clutterbug. "These are people who aren't just a bit disorganized; they don't understand routines and don't have time-management skills," says Vancouver-based professional image organizer Rowena List. "Clutter robs you of time; it can cost a whole lot of money and, depending on how overwhelming it is to you, it can leave you with a heavy feeling in the pit of your stomach." Hoarding stuff has also been linked to genetics and can run in families, says a British study published in the *American Journal of Psychiatry*.



