

- » Understanding what minimalism is and how it can help you
- » Removing too much stuff and creating clutter-free, quieter spaces
- » Bringing intention to your decisions

Chapter **1**

Meeting Minimalism

The stereotypes of a minimalist abound. Owns one chair; it's uncomfortable. Rotates between seven identical black shirts. Reuses zip-top baggies from five years ago. Chooses a flip phone "for clarity." These are certainly "less" versus "more" choices. Are they the right choices for you? Maybe.

But your version could tilt more toward a family room with cozy seating for eight and still space for an impromptu dance party. Or a closet where hangers don't touch and enough options so you feel confident dressing for any occasion. Or a phone with the apps you need and photos you can find the first time you look for them.

Grab your one fork and let's dig in.

Getting the Lowdown on Minimalism

Most of us don't set out to live cluttered, distracted lives — it just gradually and quietly happens. Stuff accumulates because we keep more than we get rid of. Schedules fill up and we bob from one activity to another as life ever accelerates. Money decisions start to feel reactive as we try to keep up with day-to-day living while not completely losing sight of the future. And our phones and other technology compete for every spare moment of attention, at stop lights, before going to sleep, and any time we have more than ten seconds to wait.

Somewhere along the way, it gets harder to focus on what actually matters. That's where minimalism comes in — not as a trend or a set of strict rules, but as a way to mindfully live your life.

Mentioning minimalism's meaning



REMEMBER

Many people's definition of minimalism is pretty spare — few possessions, little color, lots of negative space, modern aesthetic. That's certainly the stereotype. And we agree with some of it. A minimalist life helps you feel calm and in control in a world that can feel overloaded and chaotic, and it can help you focus on what matters.

We don't think minimalism means owning little (although it likely means owning less), and we don't care what type of furniture you have or how seldom you check email.

For us, minimalism is about making choices on purpose — getting rid of distractions so you can focus on what really matters, and making more intentional choices about your stuff, your money, and your digital life so you can better appreciate this world and the people in it.



REMEMBER

Your definition of what's important and what's distraction won't necessarily be the same as your best friend's, and it may not match the thinking of the latest minimalist influencer. And that's okay. What's important is that you decide what makes sense for you. And your priorities and goals will change as your life changes, so as you navigate this book and determine what minimalism means to you, know that you may rejigger that definition more than once as you move through life's seasons.

Gaining more by having less

You might be drawn to minimalism because you want more calm, more clarity, and more space for the people, goals, and moments that make life feel meaningful again.

In the face of a lot of stuff, which most of us have too much of, a minimalist lifestyle can make everyday life feel more manageable and less distracting. By owning less (and making sure what you own feels meaningful), being more thoughtful about how you use your money, and setting boundaries around technology, it becomes easier to pay attention to what matters to you. Decisions take less effort because there are fewer to make, and there's less in the background competing for your attention. Take a look at Chapter 2 for a deeper dive into minimalism and its benefits and Chapter 3 to determine what “enough” means to you.

Over time, minimalism helps you align daily habits with your priorities, rather than reacting to whatever's most loudly demanding a response. The goal isn't perfection or deprivation, but a steadier, calmer way of living that leaves more room for the people, activities, and values you care about. Chapter 3 can help you determine your goals and priorities, which then guide decisions about what you own, how you spend your money, and how you spend your time.

Decluttering Your Physical Spaces

Whether your definition of minimalism is strict and includes only the bare necessities, or it's expansive and includes many nice-to-haves, a minimalist house is one without clutter. By the time you're done decluttering, every piece of furniture, every article of clothing, every kitchen gadget and office accessory will have been thoughtfully reviewed and retained because they support your minimalist goals, or removed because they don't.

Considering how long it'll take



REMEMBER

Getting to a decluttered state isn't quick and it's sometimes not easy; you may feel a lot of feelings as you take numerous trips down memory lane. But paring back your possessions is more time-consuming than it is difficult. If you've had a couple of decades or more to accumulate all that you own, it'll take more than a few weeks to review and get rid of all of the items that you don't want anymore. It could take you several months, depending on how much time you can allocate to the declutter process. But that's okay. Modest progress is still progress, and that's worth celebrating.

Getting going, one space at a time

Start by gathering supplies and developing a game plan (see Chapter 4). Having some bins or boxes on-hand to categorize keepers from the rest makes it easier to organize items once you're done. Then go through your home room by room, reviewing everything you own and deciding what to keep and what to get rid of (and what to do with the stuff you don't want it anymore). You can start anywhere you want; this book kicks off with the closet and all your clothes, shoes, and accessories (see Chapter 5), but you can start elsewhere if you'd rather. And it can be hard for some people to get going — if your closet is packed full, or even if there's still plenty of room to maneuver items, you may struggle to take the first step.



TIP

The idea of reviewing your *whole home* can be a bit much for even the most decisive among us. So we recommend starting with something small — your shoes, your jewelry, your baseball hat collection. Action creates momentum, and once you get going it's easier to continue.

You'll hit all the main spaces in your home — bedrooms and bathrooms (Chapter 6); the kitchen (Chapter 7); and your living space, your workspace, and storage areas (Chapter 8).



TIP

Get the kids to help if you've got any living at home (earning their keep, especially if they're older!), enlist the help of friends, and grab your partner or roommate to assist at least with areas you frequently share with them. Although you'll probably want to make the keep/discard call on some precious items, you can easily give broad guidelines that'll allow helpers to make decisions for about 80 percent of the items that cross their paths.

Once you've decided what to keep, make sure to take care of the items so they have a good long life; Chapter 9 gives you tips to do so.

Being Minimalist with Your Money

Minimalism isn't just for where you live and work. As with general minimalism, having a minimalist mindset about your finances can help you understand (or establish) your financial goals (see Chapter 10) and then make decisions that help you achieve them. Regardless of how much money you make or how much savings or debt you have, aligning your financial decisions with what's important to you helps remove distractions so you can stay focused on what matters.

Benefiting from a budget



REMEMBER

We think a smart first step is to establish a budget. We firmly believe that living within your means is a goal everyone should have, particularly minimalists who are seeking to escape the trappings of excess, and the easiest way to do that is to create a budget and then monitor your spending so you stick to your monthly financial plan. Chapter 11 helps you figure out where you're spending your money so you can align your spending with your income, if needed, and so you can create a budget based on your needs.

Ditching debt



Another important step in financial minimalism (and a good personal finance practice in general) is to get rid of debt. Unless you've borrowed money with no interest and an infinite time to repay it, you want to eliminate your debt as soon as your circumstances allow — the longer you owe money to a person or a lender, the more interest you're paying, and you'd rather keep that money for yourself! Chapter 12 gives lots of tips on chipping away at and finally eliminating debt that you owe.

Making investments

Once your debt's paid off, it's time to make your money earn for you. Enter Chapter 13, which covers investments. We think lending investments (such as high-yield savings and bonds) are preferable, low-risk choices. And ownership investments, such as stocks and real estate, are preferable higher-risk investments for higher rates of return. Chapter 13 also talks about risk assessment and helps you figure out how to use your goals and their timelines to help you determine what combination of lending and ownership investments to make.

Escaping from Digital Doom

The Internet and related technology is everywhere, and it's designed to get your attention and hold onto it like puppy with its favorite toy. This can be a good thing, because you now have so many options for living a better, richer, more informed life. But it can be bad for the infinite ways you can get distracted and waste hours of time. Want to find a farmer's field where you can pitch a tent for the weekend? There's an app for that. Trying to create social media-friendly videos that sum up 30 days' worth of activities in 60 seconds? There's an app for that, too. Worried that grandma can't drive home alone after dark? Now there are senior-specific digital solutions. Trying to stay abreast of world and local events? You've got zillions of websites, blogs, and social media feeds to choose from. Knowing what's important to you can help you take advantage of digital options while ignoring the rest.

We've become conditioned to get lightning-fast responses when we interact with technology (and love the related chemical rewards our brains get as a result), and it's hard to contain that expectation just to the tech itself. Increasingly, email can feel "slow" because someone may not get back to you for hours versus minutes, or you're expected to reply to any work-related outreach within moments, even when you're in a meeting or driving to an account or having lunch with a friend.

The instant gratification that we get from algorithm-driven technology (for example, social media and streaming entertainment) is literally rewiring our brains.



WARNING

Whether we seek it out or it shows up uninvited, the amount of digital incoming we face every day is extraordinary and ever growing. It can very easily feel out of control and suffocating, and put our nervous systems on perpetual edge.

But minimalism can help us find space, breathe more freely, and get relief from digital excess. Start by assessing how big a hold digital has on your life and figure out how mindfulness can help you manage it (Chapter 14 is a good start). Then bring order to your digital files and photos so you can stop wasting time while searching for what you need, and tame your inbox so it becomes functional again (Chapter 15 has tips for both). And deal with the biggest time-suck of all — social media and streaming services — so you can enjoy both without them ruling your life and taking you away from real-world connections (Chapter 16 gets you started). “Calm” and “digitally connected” can coexist peacefully when intentionality is in the driver’s seat.

Extending Minimalism to the Rest of Your Life

Minimalism isn’t just for reducing or eliminating stuff. Being intentional about how you eat, move, and sleep allows you to bring the benefits of minimalism to other parts of your life.

Supporting your body with minimalism

Eating with intention means you’re mindful about what you put into your body — preparing good food, enjoying each bite, and making choices that support your physical and your mental well-being. This might include choosing from a limited but healthy and satisfying menu so you lessen decision fatigue, or preparing food simply so you have few pans to clean up versus a sink full, and it always means using what you have so you don’t waste food from excessive purchasing.

A minimalist approach to fitness helps you focus on what’s important — getting your heart rate up most days and intentionally using your muscles a few days a week. You don’t need to belong to a gym or own fancy equipment to do either. You can just grab some sneakers and go for a walk, take the stairs instead of the elevator and park on the far side of the parking lot, tend to your garden, or do some

housework (or decluttering!). Being mindful about including physical activity in your life is key, and after a while, your mindful behaviors will become habits that are simply part of your everyday life.

And don't forget sleep! Taking rest is an easy way to intentionally cut out noise that's disrupting your peace and to ensure a body that's prepared to support you on your minimalist journey. For more information on being intentional about eating, moving, and sleeping, head to Chapter 17.

Leaning on minimalism to navigate life's changes

You can use minimalism to help you navigate some of life's changes and opportunities, too. As you encounter the different seasons of your life, you may have goals that include buying a home, starting a family, or downsizing or retiring as you get older. An intentional mindset and some established minimalist habits can help you prepare for and live through these new stages.

You may also encounter unexpected challenges, such as getting laid off. Knowing your minimalist goals and priorities makes it easier to navigate the uncertain waters when you're unexpectedly without income — you already know what's important to you, and you already have a budget and the discipline to keep your spending on track, so making adjustments and reprioritizing is something you're more easily able to do. You can find more information on planning for some of life's expected, and unexpected, transitions in Chapter 18.

Building Momentum If Getting Going Feels Hard



TIP

When faced with the prospect of assessing all that you own, evaluating and changing how you manage your money, and modifying how you spend your digital time (you know you should, but it's so hard to say no in the moment — those app developers sure know what they're doing!), taking the first step toward minimalism can feel overwhelming. We get it — it did to us, too! So we've provided some easy to implement quick-start actions you can take in Chapter 2. Each doesn't take much time to do, you get a sense of accomplishment without a lot of effort, and you build some momentum that creates the motivation to dive in and start making some bigger changes.

