

DEALING WITH DIGITAL CLUTTER

The importance of digital organisation cannot be overstated

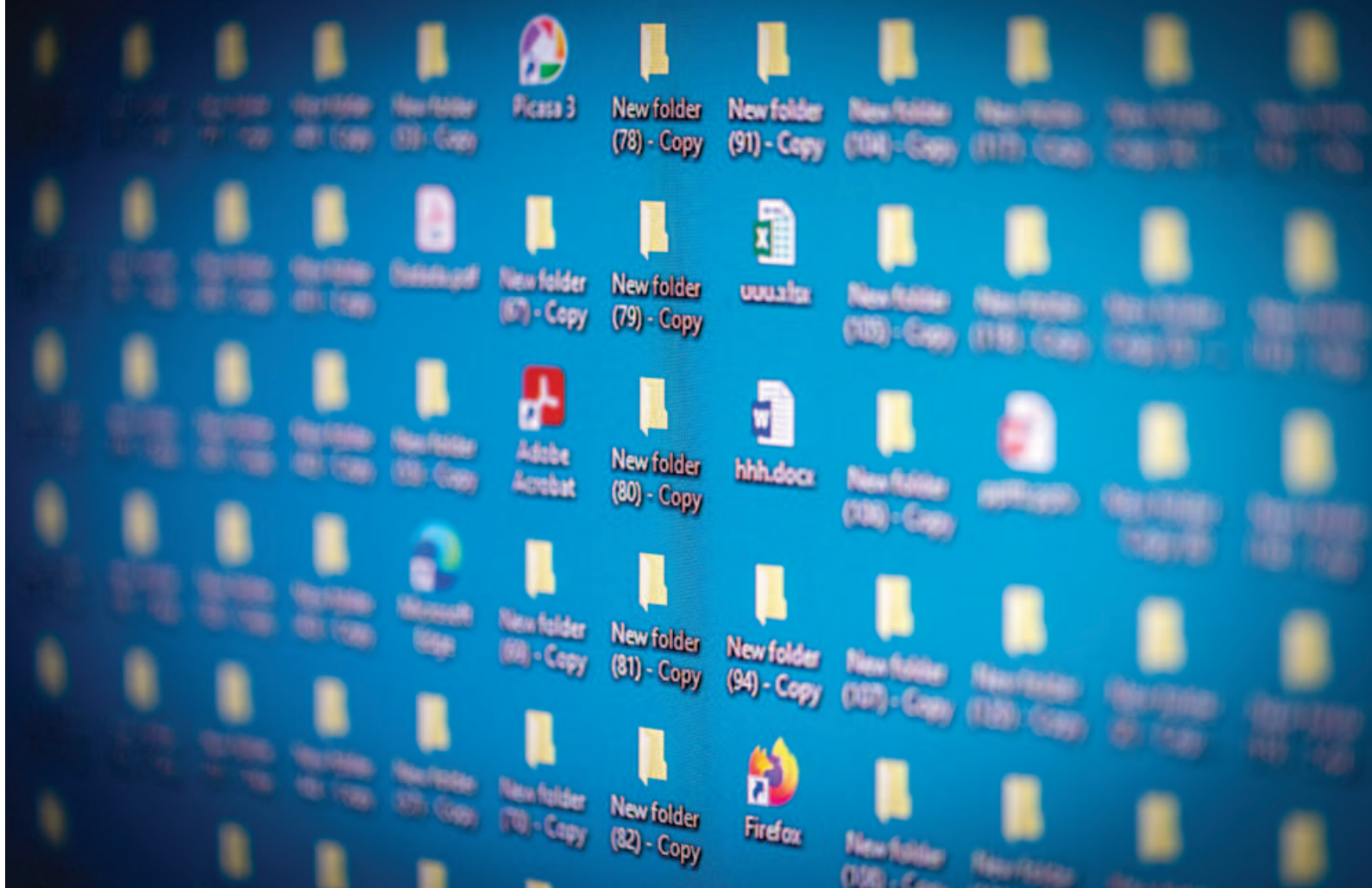


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The virtual world hums with a ceaseless barrage of pings and pop-ups – where drowning in a sea of emails, stacked data files, and multiple tabs is an all-too-familiar scenario. An unrelenting cascade of content is thrown our way, at all times. While we are being swept away in a whirlpool of distractions, this endless stream of digital noise often creates a sense of mental exhaustion due to digital clutter. Much like its physical counterpart, this phenomenon refers to the state of disorganisation of

data within our virtual spaces.

What makes it tempting to hoard information, however, is the convenience of cloud storage and vast device capacity. Users are often under the illusion that every file, picture, or link might prove useful in the future. For many, digital clutter sneaks in unnoticed. It begins with storing several unused screenshots on the phone, leaving a few browser tabs open 'for later', or accumulating countless saved articles and documents that never get read – eventually compounding into an overwhelming cluster.

One primary reason why digital clutter persists is because we often fail to accurately gauge out precisely how useful some data is to us. A study published in the *Journal of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders* reveals that individuals who tend to stack information often overestimate the value of their digital possessions. This can lead to significant distress over the thought of deleting digital items. Such findings underscore the profound impact of our relationship with digital possessions and the impact it has on our mental well-being, making

it imperative to address the rising phenomenon.

The cluttered digital landscape can mimic the effects of physical chaos, with similar outcomes on emotional health. Research has drawn parallels between digital overload and mental fatigue, highlighting how multitasking and constant interruptions diminish cognitive performance. Switching between tasks consumes more time than anticipated, leaving the brain scattered and depleted. Over time, this pattern cultivates burnout, making even the simplest of responsibilities feel overwhelming.

Virtual clutter also significantly impacts workflow. When our digital spaces are unorganised, it becomes increasingly difficult to locate specific information, leading to wasted time and mounting frustration. Besides, the constant influx of information can overwhelm our cognitive abilities, making it difficult to focus and prioritise tasks. Often, productivity turns into a myth in the digital expanse.

In addition, digital clutter may pose security hazards. As we accumulate more and more digital data, we increase the potential for data breaches and cyberattacks. This is because the more files a user has on their device, or on the servers or cloud system, the greater the odds that a perpetrator can access them. However, it is possible to reduce the risk of sensitive information being compromised by regularly decluttering our digital spaces.

Adopting a habit of digital organisation can implement several benefits, extending beyond technical performance. Firstly, it promotes a sense of control and reduces the mental fatigue that accompanies digital chaos. By categorising files, emails, and other digital assets systematically, users can achieve a clearer state of mind, akin to how a tidy workspace fosters productivity and creativity.

Additionally, regular digital maintenance encourages mindful consumption of information. When we consciously sort through our digital spaces, we become more selective about what we save or download, reducing the

tendency to hoard unnecessary data. This practice cultivates an approach to technology where the quality of content takes precedence over quantity, and distractions are effectively minimised.

Another key advantage lies in sustainability. Data storage, though seemingly intangible, has a tangible environmental impact. The energy consumed by data centres and cloud storage contributes significantly to carbon emissions. By deleting unused data and reducing storage requirements, we indirectly lower our digital carbon footprint, contributing to a greener planet.

Decluttering your digital space involves a systematic approach. It is essential to identify areas that demand attention and create a manageable roadmap. This could include purging obsolete files, deleting pictures, or unsubscribing from unwanted newsletters. You may consider uninstalling unnecessary apps and unfollowing creators on social media whose content no longer resonates or adds value to your life in order to streamline a minimal digital experience. With the help of regular maintenance, it is possible to prevent further digital clutter.

By taking proactive steps to declutter our digital spaces, we can enhance our productivity, embrace mindfulness, and protect our privacy online. Adopting a minimalist approach to digital consumption and regularly maintaining our virtual environment leads to a more focused, efficient, and sustainable lifestyle.

References:

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How stress eating might put you at risk of prediabetes

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Most of us have turned to food for comfort during stressful times as it is a common way for a lot of people to cope with negative emotions. Stress eating, often triggered by anything from work pressure to personal struggles, can feel soothing in the moment. But the food items we typically reach for, loaded with excessive sugar and unhealthy fats, can do more harm than good.

When you're stressed, your body releases cortisol, often called the "stress hormone," to help manage the "fight or flight" response. This is your body's way of preparing for a perceived threat by providing an energy boost. However, when stress becomes chronic, cortisol levels remain elevated, disrupting your body's natural balance.

One of the side effects of cortisol is an increase in appetite, especially for quick-energy foods like sugary, high-calorie snacks. This craving isn't random, cortisol prompts the body to seek out foods that can rapidly replenish energy stores, even if there's no physical danger requiring such fuel.

The repeated consumption of these comfort foods leads to frequent blood sugar spikes, causing the pancreas to produce more insulin to manage the excess glucose. Over time, the constant demand on the pancreas can wear it down, leading to insulin resistance, a major precursor to prediabetes.

Prediabetes is a condition where blood sugar levels are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be classified as type 2 diabetes. Think of it as a warning sign, a critical stage

where your body is signalling that your glucose metabolism isn't functioning as it should. This stage is often overlooked because it doesn't have obvious symptoms, but the damage to your body may already be underway.

According to an article, titled "Prediabetes Prevalence by Adverse Social Determinants of Health in Adolescents", published in *JMAPediatrics*, nearly one in three adolescents and teens has prediabetes and the rate among 12 to 19 year-olds more



ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA AFRIN TARANUM

doubled between 1999-2002 and 2015-2018, jumping from 12 percent to 28 percent.

Common signs of prediabetes include fatigue, unexplained weight gain, darkened skin patches (especially on areas like the neck, armpits, or elbows), blurry vision, and increased hunger. These symptoms may seem minor or easy to overlook, but they can be early signals that your body is struggling with blood sugar regulation.

Fatigue often results from

your cells not receiving enough energy due to insulin resistance. Unexplained weight gain, especially around the abdomen, is another sign, as excess glucose gets stored as fat when it's not used for energy. Darkened skin patches, a condition known as acanthosis nigricans, can appear as a direct result of insulin resistance and often serve as a visible warning sign. Blurry vision occurs when high blood sugar affects the lens of your eyes, while constant hunger is your body's cry for more energy because glucose isn't being effectively utilised.

The first step in addressing prediabetes is becoming aware of the triggers behind unhealthy habits, particularly stress-driven cravings. Understanding why you reach for comfort foods can help you interrupt the cycle and make more mindful choices. Stress is a major driver of unhealthy eating patterns, and managing it in healthy ways is essential to preventing prediabetes.

This means finding alternatives to emotional eating like taking a walk, meditating, journaling, or talking to a friend when stress strikes. Incorporating small, sustainable changes, such as opting for whole foods over processed snacks, staying active, and prioritising sleep, can significantly reduce your risk. Remember that every step toward managing stress and making healthier decisions is a step toward reversing the prediabetic stage and safeguarding your long-term health.

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It is time we rethink new year's resolutions

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The calendar has begun to collect dust on the table, along with the sticky note with our new year's resolution on it as we've passed the first month of the new year.

The practice of beginning a new year by attempting to implement changes and attain goals to help us become the best version of ourselves isn't new. After all, twelve new months that are yet to be tainted give us the potential for a new start. Despite the warm welcome to new beginnings, the days pass at a faster pace and our fervour to implement meaningful changes fades.

Resolutions have a way of making themselves big and grand, often inspiring us to take on challenges that might prove to be unattainable or unrealistic later on. With that being said, it is important to remember to aim for plausible personal goals that bring about positive changes no matter how big or small. A fresh start also does not necessarily mean remodelling your whole life; instead, it means refining what is working and letting go of what is not.

Instead of framing our resolutions as yearly goals, we could instead opt to break them into daily or weekly goals. For instance, if your goal is to hit the gym, it might be better to aim for a weekly number of days that you'd like to attend the gym than just going every day for the

first five days of the year. What this will do is give you severe muscle cramps and cause fatigue. In the process, your resolution remains unfulfilled. Dividing the task into weekly activities instead of daily ones will allow you to maintain the pace. This will not only make it more manageable, but will also give you a sense of achievement.

It is also important to remember that a fresh start cannot simply be forced into our schedules. It requires mindfulness on our part as well, and that starts with taking care of your physical and mental health. A start to the latter might begin with a shift in mindset as well as learning self-compassion. Some actionable steps might include decluttering your physical space, setting boundaries, practising mindfulness, or prioritising rest, which are all powerful ways to reset and recalibrate. This enables creating space for newer and better things to take root. Anything that creates a lasting positive impact on yourself should be considered a milestone.

The concept of a fresh start is not about perfection but about persistence. We aim to create work-life balance but fall back into the

same patterns. It is not easy to let go of old habits and learn new ones. Adapting or applying change is not a linear development. So, instead of abandoning your resolution entirely, take a moment to pause, reassess, and reflect on your progress. Give yourself the due credit and modify your goal to fit your current reality.

Regardless of the date on the calendar, the act of learning, improving, and self-growth, is a continuous process. Even though a new year, in all its glory, seems like an optimum opportunity to take on challenges and bring about changes in our lives, a fresh start is not defined by a new year or a birthday. We can aim for a clean slate on a random Monday evening, halfway through a dull ordinary month, or in the middle of a challenging day. Even when things feel overwhelming, remind yourself that it is okay to pause, reset, and start over. We do not need to abandon our goals just because we did not get it right the first time. And we definitely don't need a new year to start over.

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