

# Feng Shui Your Figure

Clear the clutter and lose the butter (off your hips, thighs and stomach).

BY PEGGY HALL

**A** funny thing happened after my husband and I cleared out our attic recently: I lost weight without even trying. The act of tossing out old holiday decorations, warranties for appliances we no longer owned, shoes missing a partner and stacks of empty boxes left me feeling so clean, light and free, it was as if I had shed 10 pounds on the spot. Over the subsequent days, I experienced such a sense of buoyancy, clear thinking and optimism that I was motivated to dispose of even more clutter from cupboards, cabinets, dressers and drawers. I started making my way through the clothes closet when I discovered that my favorite jeans were at least one size too big. I must have subconsciously transferred my lightness of being to a lightness of body, and I dropped the weight – my own body clutter – almost effortlessly. Hmm... there must be something more to this decluttering, I thought, than just getting rid of stuff.

My hunch was confirmed by organizational guru Peter Walsh, host of TLC's hit show *Clean Sweep*. The clutter-busting expert believes there is often a strong connection between hav-



Dejunking your home can be the first step toward a junk-food free future, a healthier body and a happier you.

## LETTING GO

Space-clearing expert Karen Kingston says she's never met an overweight person who didn't have clutter. "Both body fat and clutter act as protective layers to help a person feel less emotionally vulnerable," she explains. "Unfortunately, it's just an illusion." In her book *Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui* (Broadway, 1999), Kingston says that clutter is actually a form of stagnant energy that drains your life force, resulting in lethargy, procrastination, disorganization, even depression. When you're stuck in the midst of clutter, it's as if you've put your life on hold. "When you let it go, you also let go of the emotions attached to the clutter and no longer feel the need for the extra layers of body fat anaesthetizing those emotions," she says. "Letting go of clutter leaves you free to be you, which is the greatest gift you can ever give yourself."

Start by purging your home of everything you no longer need, use or love. "Start with one small area, like a drawer. You'll be amazed at how much more energy you'll have after clearing." Like Walsh, Kingston has heard from many people who have lost weight after getting their homes in order. "As one woman put it, 'After you have cleared the junk out of your home, it doesn't feel quite right to keep putting junk food in your body.'" Kingston says that clearing sentimental clutter is particularly effective, but it can be the most challenging, so she recommends starting with general clutter first and progressing to the sentimental stuff later.

For more information on clearing clutter and finding yourself, visit Kingston's website at [spaceclearing.com](http://spaceclearing.com).

Peter Walsh offers decluttering tips at [peterwalshdesign.com](http://peterwalshdesign.com).

ing clutter and being overweight. "Fat, like clutter, is overwhelming," he says. "Excess is always hard to manage – by its very nature, it makes you feel out of control." But it's not about the stuff, Walsh contends, it's about creating the life of your dreams and making decisions that support your vision. "The physical clutter around you and the emotional clutter inside you prevent you from living the life you want and

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being the person you wish to be." His advice? Start to clear the physical clutter, and the rest will begin to fall into place. "As soon as people have space to breathe, their spirits lift," Walsh says. "They have new energy and hope." Indeed, many of Walsh's clients discovered that as they cleared out their homes, other areas of their lives became more streamlined and organized as well. Work, family, relationships, body size – all were positively impacted by the domino effect of decluttering. Aha! I knew it.

It turns out that the clutter-butter connection is quite a widespread phenomenon. So much so that Walsh is devoting an entire book to the topic. He was putting the finishing touches on *Does This Clutter Make My Butt Look Fat?: An Easy Plan for Losing Weight and Living More* (Free Press, 2008) when I tracked him down for an interview. "I've taken all my ideas about decluttering and applied them to diet and weight loss," he said, speaking to me from his Los Angeles home. (I imagined him in a gleaming white, decidedly uncluttered kitchen.) "Instead of asking yourself how much you want to weigh, ask yourself what you want from your body. Do you want to run and play with your kids, or do you want to be a Rubenesque grandma with full thighs for cuddling grandkids on your lap? Both are fine. But you decide!"

OK, I want to be lean and strong, with enough energy to surf in the morning, do yoga in the evening and accomplish everything that needs to be done in between. I want to have the time and space to be able to prepare healthy meals for my husband. And, I want to be able to wear anything in my closet and have it fit well and feel wonderful. But when you've got a home office and a storage unit and you're a collector of all things mid-century, there is a lot of clutter to bust. Where to begin?

Following Walsh's lead, I decide to focus on the kitchen first. Repeating his tag line like a mantra ("Clutter gets in the way of living the life that you want"), I employ one of his tried-and-true methods for figuring out what to keep and what to toss: the One Month Cardboard Box test. I empty out a kitchen drawer of knives, spatulas, tongs, cheese

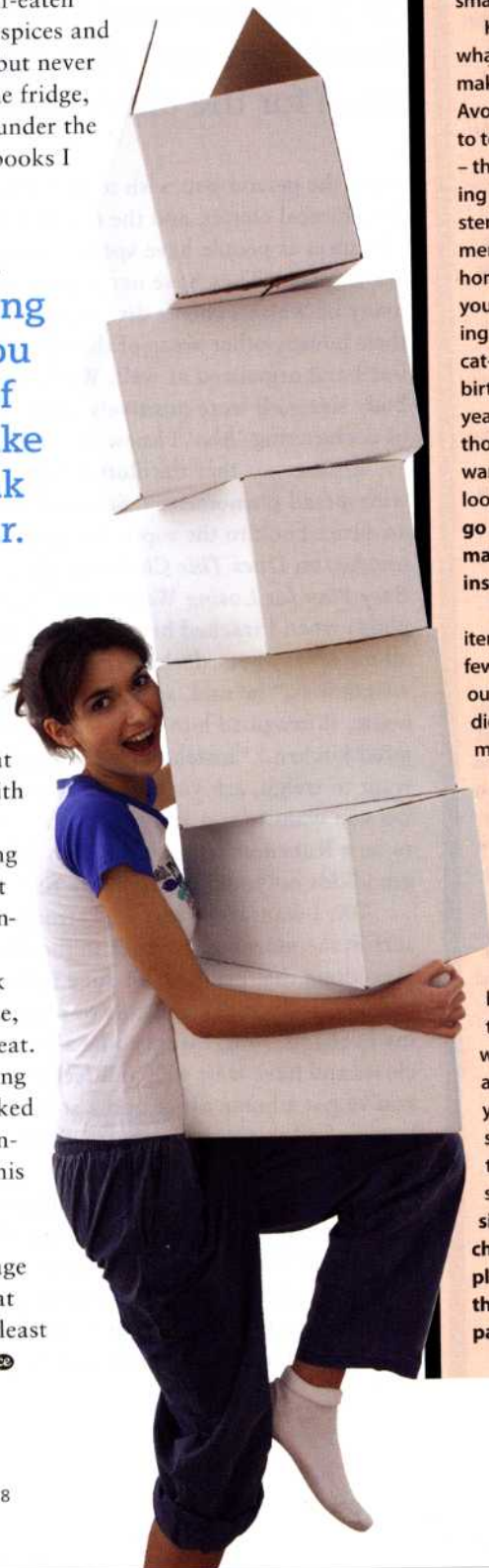
slicers, vegetable peelers, can openers and a turkey baster and place them all in a box. For four weeks, every time I use one of those items, it goes back into the drawer. At the end of the month, I keep only what's in the drawer. (I get a pass on the turkey baster since it's a seasonal item.) Gee – I really can get by on just a few essentials. The rest goes to charity.

“Making your kitchen lighter is a step toward making yourself lighter,” Walsh admonishes. “Keep only what you love and use.” I work my way through the pantry, purging it of half-eaten boxes of crackers, stale spices and teas I thought I'd love, but never drank. I moved on to the fridge, then the cabinets, then under the sink. I gave away cookbooks I

**Clutter gets in the way of living the life that you want. Let go of items that make your heart sink instead of soar.**

never used, diet books that taunted me with their impossible meal plans, and gizmos and gadgets that only took up space. With each round of clearing and cleaning, organizing and straightening, I felt cleaner and more organized too. I had accomplished a daunting task with efficiency and ease, and it made me feel great. I celebrated by preparing a nutritious home-cooked meal, and my hubby enthusiastically showed his appreciation.

By the way, we're emptying out the storage unit this weekend. That should be good for at least another five pounds! ☺



## Clutter Busting 101

When you toss out the old, you make room for the new – new ideas, new energy, new joy, new possibilities. And, let's not forget a new pair of pants, in a smaller size, please.

Keep what you love, what you use, and what makes you feel happy! Avoid the temptation to toss out everything – the goal of decluttering is not to create a sterile, stark environment, but to create a home that reflects who you are. There is nothing wrong with keeping cat-shaped magnets or birthday cards from years past, as long as those things bring you warm fuzzies when you look at them. **TIP: Let go of items that make your heart sink instead of soar.**

Save cherished items. During a move a few years ago, I tossed out some things that I didn't realize I'd miss so much. My heart still aches for a sewing basket that my dad had hand-painted with pink and white daisies. True, it had become a bit tattered and I wasn't sewing anymore, but just looking at that basket filled me with a sense of comfort and love. I still scour yard sales and thrift shops in the hopes that it will turn up some day. **TIP: Consider putting your cherished items on display so you can enjoy them now, instead of packing them away for**

later.

Pare down duplicates. My hubby and I realized we had several coffee decanters in our collection that were exactly the same. We perused our finds and kept only those we really loved. **TIP: Sell your collectibles on eBay and make some money while making someone else happy!**

Take care of unfinished projects. Clothes that need mending, emails that need answering and a picture that needs framing are examples of clutter that can drain your energy and keep you stuck. **TIP: Schedule a time on your calendar to attend to these items, and keep the appointment.**

Get rid of clothes you don't wear. Give away anything that is too small, too big, unflattering or uncomfortable. Keep and purchase what fits you now. If you lose weight, great! Go out and buy something new – you deserve it. **TIP: Clothes that are too big or too small are subtle, yet powerful reminders of the past and future. Live in the now instead.**

Avoid sending your clutter to live with others. It's about as bad as pushing cheesecake on a dieter. I used to give my mom the nail polish, creams and lotions that came as free gifts with purchases, until I realized all those soaps and potions sat unopened on her bathroom counter. **TIP: Donate**

suitable items to a women's shelter, children's hospital or nursing home instead.

Give away gifts that you don't use or love. Oh, this is a tricky one, I know. But it's easier when you consider that the act of giving took place whether you keep the item or not. The love and thoughtfulness that went into the gift still occurred, even if you no longer have it. **TIP: Let well-meaning friends and family know that when it comes to gifts, you would prefer movie tickets, a donation to your favorite charity or simply time spent together in lieu of more stuff.**

Think about how someone else will benefit from your donations. It's easier to give something away when you think of its new home and how it will make someone else happy. **TIP: Donate unused Christmas cards to a nursing home (include a cheery message) and send CDs and DVDs to military troops overseas.**

Remember that you can still hold on to a memory even if you don't hold on to the item. When fire threatened our home, I rushed to save my boxes of photos and journals. That's where my memories are stored. **TIP: Take a photo of things you want to remember, but don't want to keep. You can always refer to the photos when you want to jog your memory.**