**Brain Dump Guide**

Your first step in calming the mess inside your head with *Simplified Organization.*

For a thorough brain dump, we gather everything that needs to be gathered into one pile. What needs to be gathered? Everything loose: loose change, loose thoughts, loose toys, loose legos, loose screws, loose schedules – whatever is rattling around homeless, disconnected, and unresolved. These are “open loops,” and they make us feel scattered, ineffective, and stressed.

A brain dump is a great first step toward organization because it’s low commitment. You don’t have to do anything or decide anything – yet.

All you have to do is gather up all the things rattling around the edges of your home and mind into one place. Make them into a big heap (or pages upon pages of scribbled notes), and that’s it for now.

Brain dumps are a key strategy that I return to over and over again. If you start suffering from vague overwhelm or nagging unease, try a brain dump.

**Motto: Write it down, right away.**

Begin by sitting at the table with some coffee or ice cold water, a notebook full of blank pages, and a sharp pencil or your favorite pen. Think. Write down the fragments that come to mind. Getting them onto paper will help clarify what’s on your mind and allow you to deal with it more concretely.
Whenever you think of anything you want to do, think about, decide, or change, write it down, right away. Keep your notebook handy for at least a week as you work through the list provided here. Anytime something you want to remember pops into your head, add it to your notebook as soon as possible.

This is a habit to build and will cause you to trust your system and yourself much more. Write it down, right away is a key concept. You might even want to write it large on your notebook cover!

**STEP ONE: GATHER PHYSICAL STUFF**

Assemble the physical things around your home that are homeless or need to be dealt with. Just shove them into a big box. That’s all. If you know it’s garbage, throw it away, but don’t spend any time thinking about it. If you stop to think, just toss it in the box.

Go all through the house and gather the physical clutter or to-do items into a single container (or multiple, if you fill your first, but don’t sort anything yet).

- drawers
- closets
- under the couch
- under the cushions
- top of the dryer
- pantry
- under dressers
- under beds
- cupboards
- bookshelves
- car
• purse
• diaper bag
• any other hiding places

If you’re anything like me, each room has a place where the piles accumulate. Get rid of the piles – or, at least, make them all into one big portable pile.

**STEP TWO: GATHER MENTAL STUFF**

Next, you will discover the loose ends you might have buried below consciousness, causing low-level stress that might actually be simple to solve.

First, go back through all the house with your notebook and pen. As you wander and peer in each room, jot down thoughts that occur to you:

• Does anything need to be fixed?
• What would you like to be in this room?
• What do you wish weren’t in this room?
• Do you need to talk to someone else about something related to this room?

Second, sit with your calendar and your notebook with pen.

• What’s coming up in the next month?
• What do you need to do to get ready?
• What should be on your calendar that isn’t?
• What would help you make and keep a more accurate calendar?
• What else occurs to you as you look through your calendar?
Think through your calendar and your list here and see if there are other obligations you’re "assuming" and leaving off the list. Don’t assume anything. Write it all down. Third, think through your life and lifestyle.

- What do you want to accomplish?
- What path do you want to travel?
- **What attitudes do you need to change?**
- What habits do you need to break and build?
- What areas do you want to grow in?
- What needs to happen in your house and life daily & weekly?
- What would help you start your days strong?

Write down whatever comes to mind! You aren’t committing at this phase, just emptying your head so you can deal with it later.

Fourth, think through these prompts and write down whatever comes to mind.

- car repairs
- car maintenance
- kids’ chores
- schoolwork
- housework
- jobs
- hospitality
- church
- personal devotion
- extended family
- friends
- accountability
• habits
• routines
• games
• sports
• exercise
• music
• art
• hygiene
• schedules
• meals
• menu planning
• grocery shopping
• office supplies
• medical needs
• precautions
• concerns
• yardwork
• personal grooming
• library
• reading
• storage
• gift-giving
• papers
• magazines
• junk mail
• email
• cleaning supplies
• projects
• responsibilities
• parenting
• bills
• budgeting
• holidays
• birthdays
• family traditions
• vacations
• clothes & shoes
• home improvement

This isn’t a pity party list or self-criticism inventory. Remember to give yourself credit for what does get done.

Spend a couple days just filling up that sheet. It’s a brain dump. Let it all out and get it all written down.

Collecting all your thoughts and obligations is a big project, especially if it’s the first time you’ve done it. Allow several days and maybe even several weeks to just let things rise to the surface and to your attention. It’s like peeling onion layers: you examine one level only to reveal another you hadn’t noticed before.

Give it time and try to be thorough.

You’ll be amazed at how much this simple practice helps you feel lighter and more in charge of the influx of information, tasks, and responsibilities.