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Holiday Hangover

Start the New Year the right way—recover from the holidays by getting organized.

BY FRANCINE KIZNER

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The holiday season is over, but the lights are still up, the house is a mess and you've gained 5 pounds. What are you going to do about it?

First, you'll need to get rid of the holiday clutter. Take down the tree and the trimmings—think about hiring someone to do it if you can afford it—and put any presents you need to return in your trunk so you'll have them handy when you're at the mall, recommends Laura Leist, organizational consultant and author of *Eliminate Chaos*.

If you've gone on vacation, you'll need to unpack, wash your clothes, open your mail and pay your bills, says Leist: "Too many people come home and don't do that, and it's a problem to get everything back in order." She also suggests getting all family members involved in getting life back to normal—maybe you take care of the bills, while your spouse handles the laundry or returns missed phone calls.

Just getting life back to normal is challenging enough without the pressure we put on ourselves to make the New Year the best, most productive year ever; but how can you decide on something that will improve your year and be something you can actually stick to?

The key to any resolution is setting realistic goals. "You can make goals for your home like, 'I want us to park our cars in the garage by May,' or 'I don't want to pay late fees anymore,'" says Leist. "Many people make the mistake by saying they'll get their house organized, but they get overwhelmed because they don't know where to start."

Along with setting realistic goals, you need to celebrate your small achievements. "A feeling of accomplishment is important—even if you just start with cleaning out your junk drawer," says Leist.

While organization is Leist's specialty—and January is National Organizing Month—it relates to just about all areas of your life that you'd like to improve. "Getting organized is just like losing weight," says Leist. "You have to work at it . . . And you have to stay motivated."

Whatever the New Year brings; whether you want to try and plan it out from the beginning or just try getting your life back on track after the holiday disruptions, remember to set realistic and specific long- and short-term goals, and celebrate your accomplishments. "Clutter is really just postponed decisions," Leist says. "It's important to complete *something*," no matter what that something is.

Laura Leist is president and founder of locally based Eliminate Chaos LLC. Her latest book is "Eliminate Chaos: The 10-Step Process to Organize Your Home & Life" (Sasquatch, 212 pages, \$19.95), available at bookstores or on her Web site, www.eliminatechaos.com She can be reached by e-mail: laura@eliminatechaos.com or phone 425-670-2551.