

expressyourself

Get the life you want

Picture: GETTY

Break that clutter cycle

Why on earth do we acquire things to make ourselves feel better? To discover what is behind your collecting, CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE asks the experts for advice

MANY of us will have started the year having a good tidy up and marvelled at our spotless homes. But what happened next? We headed off to the sales and stocked up on bargains. Now our rooms are again crammed full of tops and trousers we're going to slim into, household gadgets we might use one day and make-up samples which are the wrong colour but we will keep anyway.

In a matter of weeks our lives have become just as cluttered as before, except this time it's harder to throw things out because they're so new. According to de-cluttering expert Beverly Wade and life coach Helen Johnston, we need to go back to the beginning of the cycle if we're going sort out our clutter problems once and for all. Looking at the reasons why we collect clutter is the key to conquering our mountains of junk.

Beverly and Helen call this "acquiring" because although we buy a lot of our clutter from shops and car boot sales, it can also be pushed through our letter boxes, delivered to our homes, handed to us in the street or given to us as gifts or free products.

"A lot of people are bringing in clutter faster than they can get it out," says Helen. "We need only look at the number of free newspapers people are given. If a system isn't in place to deal with our acquisitions they can pile up very quickly. Everyone has their own thing - some people can't resist buying clothes while others

or 'It will cheer me up' or 'I'll look gorgeous if I use this,' just before we acquire. Then, when we've acquired, we get a buzz. With our adrenaline running high, we think we have the answer to maintaining our youth or making our lives more exciting and we feel jubilant.

"But after the high comes the low," explains Beverly. "We may regret blowing our budget or bemoan the fact we don't have space for our new purchase or that we don't really need it. This is followed by negative self-talk such as 'I'm a failure' or 'I'm useless with money', which takes us back to our emotional low point."

TO BREAK free of the cycle Helen says we need to change our thoughts. She urges us to keep our goals in mind. For me this would be reducing the amount of paper coming into our home, from junk mail to newspapers and flyers.

Then we need to learn a few basics, such as saying "No" when we're offered something free that we don't need. We should also get into the habit of throwing out junk immediately and taking stuff we don't need to a charity shop.

"People can devise their own set of rules," says Helen, "such as acquiring things only if they plan to use them within the next month and they have a true need for them or if they have enough money to pay for the items in cash."

The final trick in breaking the

'Some people just can't resist buying things'

'Say no when you're offered something free'



get a high when they take home skincare products, books, CDs or make-up."

I'm now beginning to feel a little uncomfortable because I have a huge plastic storage box full of skincare products and cosmetics which I've been given and bought over the years. If there has been an offer on at a department store, I've gone along, bought two products and then been given a whole collection of smaller versions which I have squirrelled away.

Skincare isn't my only vice. As a journalist I have four newspapers delivered every day and I buy several magazines a week. They eventually go in the recycling bag but only as a result of a big clear-up. I also collect information leaflets - what's on at theatres, cinema schedules, local walks, takeaway menus and gym pamphlets are all over our house.

BEVERLY, who runs her own de-cluttering business Cluttergone says the acquiring cycle always starts with an emotional low point when we're more susceptible to our triggers.

"Our personal triggers are anything that gives us that irresistible urge to acquire," she says. "Triggers are everywhere - on the television, radio and the internet, in newspapers and magazines, on the high street, even in our mail.

"Next comes the self-talk. We says things such as 'I deserve this'



OVERWHELMED: Clutter can accumulate so quickly that it is difficult to get rid of it

cycle is to find something else to do when those negative emotions strike - something that will give you the nice feeling you wanted from acquiring, such as being pampered or feeling special or relaxed.

"If you were going to buy another nail varnish to make yourself feel special, go and have a professional manicure," advises Beverly. "That way, you're getting pampered but you're not taking anything home that will then become clutter.

"There are all sorts of other ways to treat yourself. Go for a walk, call a friend, read a book or magazine (they're already lying around the house) for half an hour, stroke a cat, watch your favourite programme, do some knitting or have a nice bubble bath.

"Another way to de-sensitise the triggers could be to visualise yourself visiting a website. Look at what you would previously have bought, then leave the site without buying anything.

"Another tip is to create your own shop at home," suggests Beverly. "We often have the things we're going to acquire already in our own homes. Have a look round. You'll be amazed at what you have that you can enjoy such as face masks, candles, unworn clothes, luxury bath oils and unread magazines - and the good news is you won't be adding to your clutter."

● Beverly Wade and Helen Johnston are currently running various de-cluttering courses. To book a place, visit cluttergone.co.uk