

Downsizing Tips for Seniors

One of the most followed organization and decluttering gurus, Marie Kondo notes, “after living comfortably in a larger space, it might seem daunting to decide what to keep and what to donate or discard, but you can live joyfully with less.”

Think of downsizing before moving as the ideal opportunity to check in with yourself, choosing items that truly mean something to you. Downsizing is a gift — it encourages you to focus deeply on building a home that brings joy and meaning to you as you navigate the process.

If you are reading this, you are either preparing for an upcoming move or have decided to stay in your home and are getting it set up for easy navigation as you age. Congratulations on making the decision. You are now ready to get started.

Whether you choose to stay in your home or move, downsizing and decluttering can make life easier and safer. However, it can also be stressful and emotional, especially if you’ve lived in one place for a while. Use this guide to help make the process smoother.

We’ll cover tips for preparing to downsize, a decluttering checklist, and ideas for staying as calm as possible, in what can be a challenging process.

Why Downsize?

The first step to downsizing is tidying your current home, only taking the pieces that mean something to you or will serve your new lifestyle well. If you are like most of us, we have storage rooms in our house to hold all of the “clutter” we never use or look at anymore. Take this opportunity to donate, giveaway or dispose of those items that no longer serve a purpose for you. Over time, our needs change. Give yourself permission to let go of these items.

Why do we downsize:

- **Cut costs.** As our homes age, incidentals can be hard to predict, but they are inevitable. Other unknowns can also include healthcare costs, home repairs, and travel. Reducing your monthly expenses may save on mortgage payments, property maintenance, home insurance, and property taxes. It can also mean lower utility and repair bills. It could become your new “just because fund” moving forward.



- **Simplify your lifestyle.** Your life gets “lighter” when the chores and to-do lists are a thing of the past. It’s a second chance to create a home that suits the needs of your current life.
- **Logistics.** Things like stairs, multiple levels, outdated bathrooms, sprawling yards, trips to the mailbox or long driveways may prove problematic as we age. Moving to a one-floor space that’s easy to maintain with access to many amenities that make life more comfortable makes good sense.
- **Family, Friends and New Neighbours.** It has been proven that social interaction is an important factor in aging well. You might move later in life to be closer to the people you enjoy interacting with. Moving into an Adult Community or Retirement Community will create new opportunities for growth and new friendships. Remember we are wired for connection.
- **Medical needs.** Seniors with conditions needing more frequent medical care may need to relocate to be near their doctor, clinic or hospital. Check what health care options are available to best be prepared for the future.
- **Better weather.** One study shows that 25 percent of older adults plan to move to a warmer climate, or have plans to live part-time in a warmer climate.

Is it Time to Downsize? Questions to Ask

For older adults, deciding where and when to move can be complex, and truly it’s a decision that is better made without being rushed. In other words, if at all possible, try to make it before it’s truly a necessity.

Here are some basic questions you can ask yourself to decide if you should relocate.

- Are you able to maintain your yard with ease?
- Do you feel isolated?
- Are you able to keep up with the interior maintenance?
- Do you have too much stuff to manage?
- Do you have a lot of equity in your home?
- Do you have unused rooms?
- Can you afford to stay in your current home for five, 10, or 20 more years?
- Is the stress of upkeeping your home affecting your sleep or your health in a negative way?
- Are you eating well and do you still want to prepare meals?

If you realize you have a lot of wasted space or too much clutter, your social interactions are lacking, or the price isn’t right, it might be time to downsize.

Preparing to Downsize

You can always spend some time paring down your possessions over time. In fact, we'd recommend it to avoid getting overwhelmed and all consumed by it. It helps to have a list of what you would like to accomplish with realistic dates attached. Aim for those dates but celebrate the end of a task no matter when it is. The point is the dates are goals that will help you keep focused on the task at hand.

To downsize efficiently for a planned move, though, you need to make some decisions first. If you know where you are going, ask for a floor plan to better select what you will be taking.

Remember to stick to the plan, it will help you prioritize your choices.

1. Plan early. Give yourself enough time to make an organized, informed plan. Some people start the “where will I move?” decision process more than a year in advance. It's also easier to adjust when you've had a while to get used to the idea. Having to rush into a relocation decision or go through your possessions at the last minute only adds stress. Consider the differences between your current space and the new one; do you anticipate any areas that might need extra attention in the planning process? Think about what a day might look like for you. What are you doing in the spaces, how would you like the spaces to feel. Does your current furniture suit the space?

Start looking for places that will take your donations of books, clothes, furniture, household items and tools. Make notes of their addresses, and hours of operation.

Ask your family to let you know what they would like, and then set a date for them to pick up the items.

2. **Decide where you'll move.** Over the years, our most helpful suggestion is to make a list of what you need to live the life you want. When you run into difficult choices during relocating, decluttering and downsizing refer to it. This process has helped many get more settled about choosing their next home and determining what to take with them to make the space feel like them. What and how you downsize depends significantly on your new home's location, size, and setup. If at all possible, get a floor plan of the new space you choose.

3. **Set goals and a timeline.** When do you want or need to move?

You'll need to find out how much lead time moving companies need. Work back from that date, considering the time you need to downsize and pack, as well as time for family if you'll be “gifting” any possessions. If it's relevant, ensure you understand what is included in the moving package you are selecting. Many storage places sell boxes in multiple sizes, we would suggest picking some up over several trips if you are looking after it yourself. Think about how heavy the size you choose will be when it's full, if you think you will be doing some lifting.

4. **Senior moving services are available.** There are some excellent providers who will give you a good direction for decluttering and downsizing to moving and placing the furniture. We are happy to suggest some of the ones we have worked with, please just ask.

Downsizing and Decluttering Home Checklist

As you start your downsizing venture, keep this checklist on hand.

- Determine a move-in date and time with the team in your Community. This may involve booking an elevator and loading bay. Your General Manager will guide you through this process.
- Change of address registration with Canada Post, send cards if need be. Make a list of who will need to get these notifications, including any routine bills that may come to you.
- Nearest healthcare clinic and hospital address. Nearest Bank, grocery store and drugstore addresses.
- Inform your financial services providers of your new address
- Inform your utility and service providers of the date you are moving, cancel as needed.
- Find out what utilities, and services you need to have installed, and arrange a date in your new home.

At least three months ahead. Processing and packing always take longer than you think. Plus, movers often need time and notice to truck and set up your items. Senior moving specialists are getting busier all the time, so it may be best to coordinate this first.

“Gift” early. This is a good time to start earmarking special items for your loved ones. Aim to distribute them before you move and if need be, set a time and day for the items to be picked up.

Make a floor plan. Know the layout and size of the new space room by room. That will help you decide what you can fit and where it all goes.

Tidy, Organize and Downsize by Category: KonMari Method ® recommends tidying by category, clothing first, then books, then miscellaneous including, bathroom, office, kitchen and sentimental items last.

For example, bring everything from separate bathrooms together for review. If you are going from three bathrooms to one or two, this will help you remove duplicates. Do the same for bedding and kitchen items.

Start small. Time is your friend! If you start early, you can take your time. Save the big, emotional stuff (art, heirlooms, photos) for later. You'll need more time to decide what you want to do with these things, but you also may have an easier time deciding once you've gotten into a rhythm with allocating the must-have basics.

Prioritize problem areas. Even though you're starting small, try to get to at least one tough job done early, such as the garage, attic, closet, or office. Eliminate the rooms you won't have in our new home, making sure the items won't be relocated to a new room, with a new purpose. Enlist help for this! If these rooms have lots of keepsakes or heavy items, you'll need help prioritizing, letting go, and lifting.

Sort by keep, toss, and give away – no maybes! If you are tempted to rent a storage locker, we don't recommend it. Mostly we see items go into storage lockers and not come out. Remember the reasons why you are downsizing in the first place, and that not everything will belong in your new life and home.

Set up and label containers for what you want to keep, donate (or give to loved ones), and throw away for each room. It's tempting to create a "maybe" pile, but try to resist! Or at least keep it to very few items. Eliminating the "maybe" option keeps you on task and helps minimize "analysis paralysis" – spending too much time focused on one thing. You can always revisit these items.

No duplicates. Other than clothing, try to keep just one of each thing. You really don't need three whisks. For large-volume things like clothes, set a limit. If you have 20 T-shirts, but you only feel great wearing three, pick your favorite five and move on.

Pro Tip: When in doubt, quiz yourself. Organizing professionals like Peter Walsh and Marie Kondo say, if you're having a hard time letting something go, ask yourself: Is it useful? Is it beautiful? Have I used it in the last year? Does it "spark joy?" This is less about organizing and more about pinpointing what you truly value.

Create a labeling system. When you're ready to physically pack, label the boxes by room and contents. That way, you can put the boxes directly in their correlating rooms, and you know what's in each. Once all the boxes in a room are packed, label each one by number and the total box count. This helps you know if something's missing. Here's an example label: "Kitchen – Daily plates and bowls. Box 1 of 10." Do the numbering step last. Otherwise, if something changes, you'll have to renumber everything.

Digitize it! Memorabilia like photos, letters, and grandkids' artwork take up lots of space. You don't have to throw it all away. Take photos, or hire a company to digitize your favorite pictures and videos onto a small device you can plug in and look at any time.



Pack an “essentials” bag. Whenever you move, you’ll need some things to be readily available. Prepare a separate bag or container of essentials, so you don’t have to hunt through boxes on day one. Your “essentials” bag should include:

- A few outfits
- Pajamas
- Toiletries, medication, and eyeglasses
- Important documents
- Basic kitchen and meal supplies (plates, cups, and utensils; snacks)
- Cleaning supplies (sponge, soap, paper towels)
- Payment for movers (and a small amount of cash just in case)

Tips for Staying Positive as You Downsize

As we age, we appreciate the quiet. Time to reflect on what needs to be done on our own time and at our own pace. Giving yourself the time to make lists and organize how you would like to see the move happen will be a gift to yourself and to those who may want to get in there and be helpful. If you get stuck in the decisions and procedures, or if it becomes overwhelming, think about the few people in your life who may be able to assist you, while listening to your concerns and ideas. Choose carefully and if possible, give them clear roles to play in your move. This communication up front, will bring more of what you need to make the move smoother.

Take time with your treasures. As you declutter, allow enough time to thoughtfully go through your belongings and enjoy the memories associated with these items.

Do a trial run. You are able to book a stay in most communities; many will let you stay for a few days to try it out. Knowing where the amenities and common areas are will help you acclimate faster.

Focus on what you’re gaining, not losing. Change is always hard, and there will be tough days. Try to think about how your life will improve with these changes. Try to leave space for items you may need to make your new home work well. You don’t need to fill every space, give yourself some time and space to get used to your new home. Think of all the extra time you’ll have to enjoy your days instead of cleaning, working, or trying to find things.

Enlist help. Even if you hire a professional moving manager, there’s a lot of detail in downsizing. You might need help with tasks like reviewing contracts, negotiating rates, site visits and trips to the various donation sites. Going through your belongings with friends and family can bring a lot of laughter and new memories.

Make plans to see people. If you're moving, set some concrete dates to meet or chat with friends. You are moving to a new home, but will have even more time to be social, if that's one of your goals. Fresh starts can be exhilarating. Familiar faces and staying busy can help speed up the acclimation process.

Join classes and clubs ahead of time. Being part of a group of like-minded people helps stave off loneliness and anxiety. If you've signed a contract, be proactive and enroll in activities you can look forward to. Your new General Manager or Activities Director can help with this.

If you need to sign up for newsletters, to stay informed as to community events. You could arrange this before you move in.

We thank the thousands of seniors living with us who have helped us understand what elements are key to a successful move.

Thank you to Konmari.com for your tips on downsizing

Thank you to seniorliving.org for the tips on downsizing

How to Downsize Your Home

Tips for a Stress-free Move

Are you newly single, a senior, an empty-nester, or do you just want to downsize?

Which group do you belong to?

