

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a pink long-sleeved cardigan over a matching top and blue jeans, stands in a kitchen. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the foreground, there is a bowl of fruit including oranges and apples, and a green ceramic cup. The background shows white kitchen cabinets with glass doors and a tiled backsplash.

Says super organizer Deborah Norville, in her kitchen, "The more you feel in control about your home and yourself, the more peace you feel and the more time you have with the people who matter to you."

To keep her household of five in order, "Inside Edition" anchor Deborah Norville plans monthly meal menus, sews and wisely spends down time sorting and storing.

FROM THE STUDIO TO THE SEWING ROOM Secrets OF HER SUCCESS

THEY LAUGH AT ME AT MY HOUSE. In fact, they laugh at me a lot. It's not my new outfit that has them grinning. No one's laughing about my hairstyle (though I did catch my husband suppressing a giggle when the colorist turned my hair pink!)

Nope, they're laughing at me and my lists.

A modern millennium momma I'm not. I'm much more connected to our cavewoman forebears: still worrying about what my family will eat, obsessing about the weekly forage for food. The only difference is that my ancestors parrolled pastures looking for nuts and berries, whereas I scout the local grocery store for sales.

I am a control freak.

I have my family's menus planned for the entire month. I've got the weekly shopping list to go with those menu plans. And not only have I written a long grocery list, but I have even organized it the way my local supermarket is laid out: fruits and vegetables first, all the way to the deli counter.

And the thanks I get for this Olympian effort in organizing? They snicker. They make fun of me. They say they don't want to eat sloppy joes on Tuesdays. "What's wrong with sloppy joes every Tuesday?" I ask.

I've begged for ideas. "Tell me what you'd like to have for supper," I implored. The little one suggested ice cream. The two bigger kids agreed on pasta and, after a long pause, added spaghetti.

The man I married isn't much help either. "Not sloppy joes!" Karl told me, emphatically.

"Well, what do you like?" I persisted.

"Everything you make is delicious," he fawned, ending the discussion by firmly putting matters of sustenance back in my lap.



Deborah with Polo, one of three family pets.

"Let them fend for themselves," I muttered as I went on kitchen strike. For a week, I left them to their own devices, without my lists and menu ideas. Within a few days there was no bread for sandwiches, we had no yogurt for breakfast, and we were growing feathers, we'd eaten chicken so many nights in a row.

And me? I was going nuts. I need to feel I have control in the kitchen, because in my house, probably as in yours, the kitchen is the hub of family life. Even if I'm working late and won't be there to prepare the dinner, I need to feel I have a hand in it.

My strike taught me one very important lesson: The more you feel in control about your home and yourself, the more peace you feel and the more time you have ▶▶▶

~ BY DEBORAH NORVILLE ~



Always time to sew

of all the items we routinely need and photocopied it. I need only to put a check next to each item when it's time to restock. Every week, a new list goes on the fridge, and as we get low on bread, milk, whatever, it gets checked off. Don't forget to jot down any special ingredients you may also want to pick up.

◀◀◀ to spend with the people who matter to you.

The more I simplify the tasks I have to do, the faster I get them done and the less they annoy me. Grocery shopping, doing laundry, cleaning, outfitting the kids, entertaining,

writing correspondence and paying bills: It's all part of life. And while some of it is downright drudgery, I don't want to give up any part of it.

By devising shortcuts for all these mostly mundane tasks, I've knocked the time they take to their minimums. If a drugstore delivers or laundry picks up for free, I'm a customer. If a grocery store is open for extended hours, it has my business. I've also discovered a terrific ancillary benefit: I feel in control. The sense of well-being and satisfaction that comes from that is something you can't put a dollar figure on.

Think It Once, Do It Forever

No matter how many kids you have or how hectic your life, somewhere in your week you have a little down time. It may be during the wait to pick up kids at school, on the train commuting from work or at night before you go to bed.

Spend a few of those extra minutes dreaming up a few weeks' worth of menus. Start by jotting down the recipes you like to make that are easy



Deborah displays her talent entries (left) for the 1976 America's Junior Miss pageant. She still mends (above left) and sews, such as this gown (above) she made for an event with General H. Norman Schwarzkopf.

and that you know your family will eat and enjoy. If you're stumped for ideas, look at the school lunch menu in the local paper. Make sure you include double-duty foods; leftovers from Wednesday's whole baked chicken will go great in enchiladas on Friday. Remember meat isn't the only source of protein. You can stretch your food dollar and add variety with bean dishes, lentils and cheese-filled casseroles. Be sure to include nutritious desserts like baked apples or fresh fruit salads, terrific ways to end dinner that are better for you than brownies or ice cream.

Put your menu on a calendar grid and post it on the refrigerator. The family naysayers can weigh in with their opinions and offer their own ideas. For me, just knowing in advance what we're having for dinner is a great stress reliever, not to mention a timesaver as well. I can easily throw defrosted chicken breasts in a marinade of soy sauce, orange juice and honey at the same time I'm giving my kids breakfast.

A preprinted grocery list is another handy tool. I've written an inventory

Least Is Best

The fewer choices you have, the less time you spend making decisions. In recent years, as my family has grown bigger and my life has become more complicated, I have made a conscious decision to limit the new that comes in. I stick to the basics and add something trendy or colorful only on occasion.

My kids wear classic clothes. I stock up on khakis, polo shirts and basic T-shirts in standard colors for the boys. For my daughter, I choose mostly solids in pretty, not funky, hues. Doing so saves a ton of time because laundry is easier to sort. And since I've found a mail-order house that carries good-quality clothes in the colors I like, I'm saving even more time when selecting the children's wardrobes.

Keeping linens to only whites is a huge simplifier. Everything can go in the wash together, you can bleach sheets and towels to perfection, and there is never any confusion about which towels belong to whom. Letting each family member have her own special color for hand towels or giving the kids cartoon-character pillowcases addresses the possessive nature of children without making laundry day a nightmare for you.

As much as I am a control freak, I am also a hoarder. I've kept dresses from 20 years ago simply because I once took good pictures wearing them. I knew I needed to part with

old clothing, work papers from years ago and even sports equipment that was outdated long ago. I couldn't just let go, cold turkey. I could, however, wean myself from it.

So can you. Take a deep breath and ask yourself these questions:

- Is this something you will wear again?
- Would your sister or best friend want it?
- Could a local charitable organization use it?
- Are the hand-me-downs nice enough for your next child?

I recently spent an entire weekend going through overflowing closets, purging them of clothes that hadn't left their shelves in ages. A lot of it went to the thrift shop. If there was a chance that something might be useful in the future, I put it in the attic, where it will stay until next year. I am testing myself. If these are items I don't long for, seek out or even think about in that time, they are history. The donation slip from the thrift shop was nice, but being free of the clutter was even nicer.

Uncluttering was a great catharsis. There is something very gratifying about opening a closet and seeing the floor or opening a drawer and seeing garments neatly arranged, not jammed into the corner. How much of your stuff do you really ever use, anyway?

Let Gadgets Help

They say the computing power of silicon chips doubles every 18 months. Unfortunately, the number of electronic gadgets seems to increase at about the same speed. Rather than go insane with the very latest gizmos that purport to make your life easier, invest

Don't be obsessive about organizing your family and home. "You can make your life easier, but you shouldn't make it unreal."

in a few that actually do. Here's my list and why:

Pocket-size organizer My purse is five pounds lighter without my appointment book in it. Rolling my phone numbers, to-do lists and calendar into one small gadget has been fabulous. (Just be sure to have a hard-copy backup!)

Computerized checking program Come tax time, you will kiss yourself for having switched to a computer to print your checks. If you are methodical about properly categorizing your payments, you will be completely organized when you need to file your taxes. You'll also be able to keep track of the family expenses.

Electronic address book I know, Emily Post says the address on a proper Christmas card is written by hand. Well, Emily Post isn't on my holiday list, and I bet she isn't on yours. Thanks to my computerized address program, my address book is not only alphabetized but legible too. With those peel-off labels, my friends actually receive their cards in December. Without them, if my friends heard from me at all, I was usually wishing them a very belated happy new year in the spring!

Cellular phone I resisted. Then I had kids. Knowing that the sitter or

my children could get me at any moment was all I needed for peace of mind. Besides, the calls I can complete while in transit (and face it, women are always in motion) are ones I don't have to bother with at home, where I'd rather be paying attention to my family.

E-mail It's a great way to stay in touch with faraway friends. I don't rely on e-mail for immediate messages, since you can never be sure an e-mail will get read quickly. But one can send, sort and read e-mails in off-hours or whenever it's convenient. It doesn't take the place of or warm the heart like a letter, but it is a nice way to stay in touch.

Perfection Isn't Real

I could go on and tell you about my labeled pantry shelves or the photo albums I get with each year stamped on the cover. I could share with you the little homemaker's calendar I devised so I order Christmas cards before Halloween and have the air conditioners serviced before Easter.

But then I'd have to tell you that we still haven't sorted through the Christmas cards our friends sent us last year. I'd sheepishly show you the piles of photos hidden in the armoire waiting for the right snowy night to come along until they get sorted. You'd get to see the armchair the dog gnawed up that I still haven't recovered and the kindergarten art projects that should have been put in a memory book long ago.

And that's O.K.

The point of all these tips on organizing and helpful hints on how to de-stress your life is really twofold: You can make your life easier, but you shouldn't make it unreal.

So you have a box of photos you never glued into the album. Big deal! You forgot to get the heating oil delivered, and the house is 53 degrees. Put on a sweater! As my mother used to say, "This too shall pass."

But there is one thing my mother never told me, and she should have: Whatever you do, don't serve sloppy joes on Tuesdays! ♦



Everything in its place