

# BrainDump

*a sanity saving solution from Mystie Winckler*

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When you take the time to jot down everything that's on your mind, you'll start clearing mental space so you can think about what's on your mind instead of merely having bits of information tossed around in a jumble in your head, causing pressure and tension.

Too often we let details, tasks, vague obligations, and ideas create a stress soup in our minds. The soup quickly becomes a bog, preventing us from thinking clearly, seeing possibilities, and sometimes even from sleeping well. A brain dump is a simple tactic to drain the bog so you can set your mental feet on dry, solid ground.

To brain dump is simply to write down what's in your head on paper. That is it. You want the paper to hold your anxieties, pressure points, reminders, tasks – as much as paper can hold – so that your mind lets go of them. If your mind can stop holding information, it will be free to do what it does better: pay attention and think. That's what you want to use your mind for.

Once you have all the things that require your attention gathered in one place, you'll automatically feel more focused and calm, because your mental energy will be freed from the burden of remembering everything you're stressed about.

David Allen, author of *Getting Things Done*, calls the floating obligations in our heads that still require remembering or decisions "open loops." Open loops nag our conscience and scatter our thoughts. Because we're trying to keep track with our heads, our heads are cluttered and fragmented, unable to focus and think creatively or problem-solve logically.

A brain dump allows you to use paper to hold your data, reminders, and concerns. When you can visually and concretely see what's going on inside your mind, you can deliberately cross things off and choose how to feel about your responsibilities.

You'll be amazed at how much this simple practice uncovers your thinking process and your thinking patterns and allows you to address them directly.

Whether thorough, targeting, or haphazard, brain dumping is a key strategy I return to over and over again. Whenever you begin to suffer from vague overwhelm or nagging unease, try a brain dump. Simply write down everything that pops into your head.

A brain dump can be as minor as jotting down that random thought so you don't forget it or as major as sitting down and writing out everything that is on your heart and in your mind - you might be surprised how many pages you can fill! Most brain dumps are somewhere in between. With an upcoming vacation, you might brain dump details and ideas for that one event. If something feels off in a relationship, you might only brain dump your thoughts and memories as well as possible solutions.

It is easy to dismiss and disregard such a seemingly insignificant practice as a waste of time, but you're actually clearing your mind of the clutter so that you can better handle life and tackle your responsibilities with clarity.

Brain dumping is actually a habit to build, not just a once-and-done thing. The more often you write down your thoughts, responsibilities, and commitments - right away! - the more you will trust your plans, your thinking, and yourself. Write it down, right away.

Make it a personal motto.

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**W**rite it down,  
right away.

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## Your First Complete Brain Dump

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Although it can be intimidating, I highly recommend starting with a thorough brain dump. It might be scary and it might take weeks, but work through all that's bouncing around in your head. When you see it on paper, you'll be better equipped to deal with it. Moreover, you will likely find solace in seeing why you felt crazy: There were a crazy number of details and nebulous thoughts floating around in your head.

Begin your first brain dump by sitting at the table with a cheap spiral notebook and your favorite writing utensil. Have a favorite beverage in hand. Take a deep breath. Think. Write down the fragments that come to mind. Getting them onto paper will reveal what's on your mind and allow you to deal with it concretely.

Even if you take an hour to brain dump in this way at first, you will still want to return to it for another week or two. Spending 10-15 minutes daily with your brain dump as you work through the prompts in this guide will give you a full notebook and a clearer head, many specific notes and a sense of purpose. Beyond the prompts, add anything to your notebook that you want to remember as it pops into your head. That's what a brain dump notebook is for.

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**K** eep a pen &  
notebook  
handy at all times.

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# Brain Dump Prompts

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Although it can be intimidating, writing down what comes to mind as you consider these various aspects of your life will be revealing and helpful to you as you begin to actually deal with not only the stuff, but your mindset and attitude around the stuff, also.

Start by looking around the house. Look at the following areas and jot down any wishes, desires, hopes, dreads - and also grateful thoughts - that come to mind.

- drawers
- closets
- under the couch
- under the cushions
- top of the dryer
- pantry
- dressers
- beds
- cupboards
- bookshelves
- car
- bedrooms
- bathrooms
- kitchen
- dining room
- office
- playroom
- family room
- living room
- garage
- yard
- garden
- animals
- purse
- diaper bag
- refrigerator
- freezer

Then, wander around your house and think about these questions, always writing down your thoughts as you go:

- Does anything need to be fixed? How important is that fix?
- What would you like this room to be used for or look like?
- What do you wish were not in this room?
- What do people use this room for? Is that a legitimate use? How can you facilitate its use?
- Does everything here have a home? What is most in need of finding a home?
- Do you need to talk to anyone else about something in or about this room?

Next, sit with your calendar or planner, with your notebook and pen in hand, and jot down what comes to mind as you consider:

- What's coming up next month?
- What do you need to do to get ready?
- What should be on your calendar but isn't?
- What would help you make and keep your calendar more accurate?
- What are you reminded of as you look at your calendar?
- Are you assuming and only mentally tracking obligations? Why not have them on the calendar?

Don't assume anything! Write it all down on paper.

Think about your life and lifestyle. Write down whatever comes to mind. Do it thoughtfully and prayerfully, not with discontent and grumbling; however, do think it all through and write everything down.

- What do you want to accomplish? Today? This week? This month? This year? In your life?
- What path do you want to travel (metaphorically or literally)? What path do you not want to follow?
- What attitudes do you need to change? What attitudes do you need to nourish and cultivate?
- What habits do you need to break or build?
- What areas do you want to grow in?
- What needs to happen in your home and life on a daily and weekly basis?
- What's unrealistic about that list?
- What helps you start your day strong?
- What helps you sleep well at night?

Starting a brain dump list is the best strategy for combating the feelings of overwhelm and chaotic thoughts. It's a quick trick to get it out of your head and onto paper; it's not supposed to be a structured, neat and tidy list.

When you get all those crazy thoughts out of your head and onto paper, you will often see that the craziness was all in your head and not reality. With it solidly, visibly on paper, you can then analyze it without being overwhelmed.

Finally, think through the following prompts and write down whatever rabbit trails come to mind. The point is the rabbit trail here. Write it down. Don't try to do all of this at once, but just cycle back to adding more and more to your brain dump notebook for the next month or two.

- car repairs
- car maintenance
- kids' chores
- schoolwork
- housework
- jobs
- hospitality
- church
- personal devotion
- reading
- 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
- wardrobe
- library
- storage
- gift-giving
- manazines
- junk mail
- email
- cleaning supplies
- projects
- responsibilities
- parenting
- bills
- budgeting
- holidays
- birthdays
- family traditions
- vacations
- home improvement
- location
- retirement
- education

This isn't a list to prompt pity parties or self-criticism or complaints. Remember to write down not only what is wrong and what needs to change, but also what is right and what good you have seen and what you are grateful for in each one.

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

## What to do with your brain dump

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So, you have pages and pages of notes.

Now what?

All the information you've collected does not necessarily require action. It doesn't even have to be kept.

The point and the benefit was in the process. As you see all that you were holding in your mind, you realize why you felt vague stress and overwhelm. As you look at the words in black and white in front of you, you can consciously choose to cross many of the thoughts out, consigning them to your mental dustbin. As you intentionally pick and choose between the good and the bad and the unnecessary, your mental bandwidth will be freed and you can better identify real priorities and next actions.

What actually needs to be kept in some sort of organized system, however, is another topic for another day.

Before you can set up an organized system of information management (ie a working planner), you need to brain dump and you need the three habits of living organized. Those habits are explained in Homemaking 101, available within Simply Convivial Continuing Education.

To follow up with more help and clarification as you brain dump, check out my blog series on brain dumping, including Q&A podcasts with my friend and assistant, Virginia Lee Rogers.

Find that here:  
[simplyconvivial.com/brain-dump-help](http://simplyconvivial.com/brain-dump-help)

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