



The Clare & Jerry Rotenberg
Institute on Aging
at Jewish Senior Life

Will the Dining Room Table Fit? Rightsizing Tips for a Smoother Move



Thinking about moving to a smaller home? Does an aging parent or loved one need to make a move?

Just the thought of downsizing or **rightsizing**, as it's often called, can be overwhelming. Our home holds special meaning. It's where we raised our families, created wonderful memories, and accumulated lots of sentimental items.

When is the right time to move? Where do you start? How do you decide what to keep, donate, or toss? What are the physical and emotional effects of a big move?

Start Early, Make a Plan

The decision to downsize is highly personal. But medical professionals and rightsizing experts agree that the sooner you start, the better the outcome.

"It's difficult to know when it's the right time. But if you don't make the decision on your own, you could end up having someone else make the decision for you," says Daniel Mendelson, M.D., Chief Medical Officer and Vice President of Medical Services at Jewish Senior *Life*.

The first step is to make a plan. Contact family members and professionals such as your attorney, real estate agent, healthcare providers, and if desired, a move manager.

"Start as early as possible. The process will take longer than you expect. Some downsizing steps require weeks to months to accomplish," says Jennifer Pickett, co-executive director of the National Association of Senior & Specialty Move Managers (NASMM), an organization that offers expertise and resources to help older adults, individuals, and families manage the stress of relocating and rightsizing.

"Stay focused on the positive aspects of rightsizing. Get excited about living in a new place with less clutter," Pickett says.

Sort, Keep, Donate, Discard

The next step in managing your move is to go through every item in your home, one-by-one. Pickett shared some top tips for tackling this task:

- Ask for help. You don't have to do it all yourself. Enlist family members or contact a rightsizing professional in your area.
- Start in rooms with the least emotional attachment, like the laundry room. The attic, basement, and garage will be the most time-consuming.
- Make "YES" and "NO" piles. No "MAYBES." Handle each item once and move on.
- Eliminate rooms you won't have in your new home and sell or donate things like extra bedroom sets.
- What to do with the huge heirloom dining table that's been in your family for generations? If you plan to take it, measure *before* you move it. This goes for any large pieces of furniture. Request a floor plan of your new space, including the width of entryways and doorways, to be certain items will fit.
- Storage space will be tight, so get rid of duplicate or multiple items. You'll only need one spatula, one set of dishes, and one hammer.
- Has an item been used in the past 6 months? If not, you probably don't need it.
- Invite friends and family over to help. If there's an item they admire, gift it to them.
- What about your beloved collection of teacups, paperweights, or souvenirs? Choose 4-5 favorite pieces. Take pictures of the rest and create a photo album of your collection.
- Boxes of old family photos can be digitized and stored for future viewing and sharing. Check online to find professionals who specialize in this.

"More importantly, remember that it's the *people* in your life you cherish, not your stuff," Pickett says.

The Emotional Side of Rightsizing

Change can be hard. Whether you're preparing to downsize or helping an aging parent or loved one through the process, it's important to understand the physical and mental effects of rightsizing.

"Moving is one of the five major changes in life. We are giving up friends and familiar places and going to a new environment," Dr. Mendelson says. He cites several factors that affect us when we rightsize, including the loss of a support system, giving up friends and familiar places, and learning our way around—to the grocery store, library and other essential places.

He cautions that a change in environment can exacerbate current medical conditions such as anxiety and depression and may throw off a person's spatial awareness. Dr. Mendelson recommends working closely with medical and mental health professionals throughout the rightsizing process to safeguard your or your loved one's well-being. If the move takes you to a new city or state, he strongly suggests checking out the health care system in that area and – given the current shortage of primary care physicians – ensure that a doctor or geriatrician is available to accept new patients.

Dr. Mendelson agrees that a positive attitude is key to a positive rightsizing experience.

"Downsizing reminds us that we are changing and aging," he points out. "But the best approach is to look at how we can *celebrate* that."

Considering making a move? Contact Jewish Senior *Life* for expert guidance and referrals at RotenbergInstitute@JewishSeniorLife.org.