

298 - How to Keep Up with Household Habits

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 298 - how to keep up with household habits. This is the constant nag, isn't it? No matter who you are or where you live, there are household tasks that you want to keep up with consistently and rarely feel like you do that well. It's easy to feel behind in our homes, like everything is at best a sneeze from falling apart. So today, we're going to talk about how to choose the household habits that matter to you and how you might keep up with actually doing them. After this episode is over, I really think you're going to feel revived when it comes to your own home and how you see the tasks you want to do for it. So let's jump in.

First, I want us to talk about how to choose the household habits that matter to you. The list of things we can do in our homes to keep it clean and tidy and well maintained and organized and all those responsibility words is a very long list. There are so many things that you could be doing every day to make your home function in a specific way. But you are a person. You are a person with many responsibilities outside of your home that take up a lot of your time. You are also a person who wants to enjoy their weekend, not just spend the whole time on house projects and cleaning tasks. The point is that you have a lot to do, and it is unlikely that you can do all the things for your home that you think you should or it's unlikely that you can do all the things for your home that you want to do without some kind of effort.

That's the kicker, right? House stuff isn't super fun. They're chores. It's cleaning bathrooms and paying bills and organizing closets and figuring out what to do with a big pile of clothes that your kid doesn't fit in anymore. I think that's one of the biggest challenges actually. Most of these things aren't super fun. You don't always look forward to them. They don't offer huge dividends outside of satisfaction or enjoying a cleaner or tidier room. Which is an important dividend, but you're not being paid to do this stuff. You have to do it because you're a grownup. It's kind of a drag.

When I was newly married and in my early 20s, I had a dry erase calendar on my fridge that was for an entire year, okay? It was likely in the 2006 range because that's when I first met Emily P. Freeman, and she saw this calendar when she and her husband John came over for dinner the first time. It's a wonder she stayed my friend after seeing this calendar, because it was the most unhinged genius thing I could do. I was so worried about getting it wrong in my home, especially as a young new wife, that I gathered as much information as humanly possible from many trusted sources, namely Real Simple and Martha Stewart, to collect the entirety of housekeeping knowledge so that I could organize it and not miss a thing. So I bought this dry erase annual calendar, and every single day, I put down the household tasks that I needed to do and the frequency with which I should do them. So every three months, I had it on my calendar to dust the baseboards. I had cleaning theme days sketched out. I would know when to vacuum the lint thing in the dryer and wash the drapes and all of those things that I thought I was supposed to do. That calendar stayed on my fridge - large and in charge - for almost the entire year of 2006 or whatever it was. And you guys, I maybe completed the cleaning tasks written on

whatever appropriate day for 10 of those 365 days. But do you know how often I thought of that calendar and what I was supposed to do? All 365. And probably more than once a day on many of those. It is so easy to put pressure on ourselves to do everything everyone else says to do.

Now if you've been listening for awhile, you are in a much better posture towards that idea than you once were. This is a place that preaches doing what matters to you in the season that you're in, no matter what someone else in a different season with different priorities might say. So I'm guessing not many of you are gripping baseboard cleaning frequency now the way you might have at one time. But it's still an important thing to bring up. It is really easy to swing from lazy to genius and back again in our homes, simply because on paper, there really is - or could be - so much to do. And when there is so much we do, we panic. We grip it tighter or we're like screw it I don't care anymore!

You are allowed to care. You are allowed to enjoy a kept house. You are allowed to let certain tasks go for so long that you don't remember the last time that you did them. You are allowed to remember your season of life and that it's not a season well suited for a lot of housekeeping tasks that were once important to you or that you had margin for. Our household habits, possibly more than most other categories of life, are full of landmines that swing us to the extremes of lazy and genius. And, of course, there is a Lazy Genius way. Let's break it down.

We'll be right back...

Our goal today is not to figure out how to fit in every household task in your already full schedule. It's also not to be like yeah whatever you can live however you want no one cares. Because I think you care. We've watched enough episodes of Hoarders and Fixer Upper to know that if you don't take care of your home, it will deteriorate. Entropy is a thing. And while you get to define what clean is for you, it is highly likely that if you're listening, you do care about your home feeling peaceful and comfortable and responsibly maintained enough that you won't have to sink thousands of dollars into its upkeep later because you haven't had anything serviced since you moved in twenty years ago. Remember, it's not all or nothing here. You can find your middle ground of naming what matters to you about your household habits and kindly finding ways to support those habits over time.

So I have a couple of questions for you to figure this out. First, in this season of life with your schedule and obligations outside of your home, with your physical and mental health and all of the things that can cause emotional labor, with the number of humans you are caring for on any given day, when you think about your home, what are 2-3 words that describe how you want your home to feel? Based on your life right now, how do you want your home to feel? Think about it. Write them down. Narrow it to 2-3 so you know how best to focus your energy.

That's the first question. How do you want your home to feel. The second question is what household tasks if done mostly every day will make your home feel that way? Make the list as long as you want for now, but ultimately I want you to focus on no more than three at a time. Originally I was going to ask what 2-3 tasks if done every day will make your home feel that way,

but you might feel initially contained and restricted by that number, and it's better to get out more than that at first. I also think it's important to name what tasks you already do regularly that contribute to your home feeling the way you want it to.

Now I hear you. A changed furnace filter is not going to make your home feel welcoming. Certain household habits, especially in the upkeep and maintenance department, don't comprehensively contribute to coziness or whatever. But I would also say those things aren't habits. Those are scheduled tasks. So often with our homes, we get the two mixed up. We think that every household task needs to be thought about and handled in the same way. Maybe you already have a habit of cleaning the kitchen before the day is over, and it's just part of your rhythm now that it would be weird and almost uncomfortable to not clean the kitchen. Remember from our habit episode, that is the literal definition of a habit. It's something so regular that it would be hard giving it up. But we often have the expectation that every household task should have the same rhythm that a habit does, that it's all part of the same bucket. You should be able to just as easily remember to change the furnace filter or replace the batteries in the smoke detectors or trim the hedges or whatever as you do cleaning the kitchen which you do habitually and automatically or whatever habit you already do. Those kinds of tasks are not the same. Those rhythms are not the same.

Your household habits, the things done every day, should contribute to how your home feels because your daily choices will most concretely impact how your home feels, not if you ran your dishwasher through a cycle with vinegar or whatever. So remember the separation.

So how do you want your home to feel, and what are some household habits that would contribute to that? Now you can put those things into an existing routine. You can listen to the habits episode and remember how to apply those principles to the household habits you're wanting to add. You can put reminders on your phone or delegate or habit stack or whatever you'd like to do, but ultimately you will feel more at home at home when you prioritize how your home feels and why it's pleasant for you specifically to be in in this season of your life. That path forward - the path of household habits to support that feeling - is different than the path of upkeep things that happen outside of a daily or sort of daily basis.

For those kinds of tasks, for the "I don't want my house to fall apart" tasks, your path is to name your upkeep tasks, know the frequency, and schedule them. I used to think I could create a rhythm where at the same time every week, I would do some sort of upkeep task, but I didn't have a list of those tasks or an adequate understanding of what needed to be done when. I was applying habit-making with scheduling, and they're two different things.

So you and any other grownups who live in your house can sit down and write down the home maintenance tasks that can easily be forgotten. And you don't have to come up with this from scratch. We'll link to something that's broken down by seasons, but you can also Google "home maintenance checklist" or something and get lots of options. But here's the thing. I'm not asking you to take that list and schedule everything on it. You can, but I don't think that's the answer nor is it always doable for everyone in certain seasons of life.

What I want you to do from that list is name what matters for your home's upkeep and maintenance this year. Just this year. Just for 2023. And then name what matters for the next couple of months. It could be that you are like "nope, I'm not going to clean my faucets of mineral deposits in 2023" and let it go. Maybe you hate the way your yard looks, but you don't have the time, energy, or money to tend to it. It's okay if it stays the way it is for 2023. You are choosing what matters to you about your home right now. That doesn't mean you'll never clean your faucets or plant shrubs or power-wash your house or beat your area rugs with a broom handle outside. It just means you're not going to this year.

We'll be right back...

We want to enjoy where we live. We know that caring for where we live is a valuable practice on physical and emotional levels. We also tend to throw both of those out the window because it feels like too much. Our mindset towards household chores is often such a losing battle. We don't have a system for everything, and frankly we don't like it. It's not fun. I don't like mopping. I don't know where the furnace is. I know that raking is important for the grass but can't it all just wither and be fine? I think it's likely that we often take our attitude toward our least favorite part of household chores and assign it to the whole thing. Our overwhelm, our loathing, or insecurity because we don't know how to do something, all of those often impact every single household chore. It's all or nothing energy and usually quite big. Too big to really handle with any sort of consistency or kindness.

So let's create a new way of thinking about taking care of our homes. First, I think gratitude is key. When we move through our homes with discontentment or frustration or something else that saps us dry, we lose the thread on what matters. So I think starting with gratitude is an important beginning step. You have a home. It might not be what you ideally want, but you have a home. And a lot of people can't say that. It's not to guilt you into being grateful. It's perspective. And remember good is here right now. Look for it. Value it. It really helps.

Next remember that there's a different approach to household habits than there is to maintenance things that happen weekly, monthly, seasonally, or annually. Or just things that come up. **Don't apply the same tactics to all tasks**. Instead, see your daily habits separately. They are meant to create an environment that matters to you. So do that. Name how you want your home to feel right now in this season. Then name what household habits support that and slowly ease them into existing routines or schedules.

For non-daily things that are easily forgotten, look at one of those maintenance lists and decide what matters for your home this year. Release the pressure to do everything. I've never de-mineralized a faucet in my life, but I have also lived in relatively new construction in all of my homes thus far. It's never mattered as much as other things. You can make those choices, too. What tasks matter now? Then you can schedule them. Space them out appropriately, and put them on the calendar to either delegate or do yourself.

A couple of additional episodes that could be helpful in this process are How to Still Have a Weekend and How to Get Stuff Done When You Don't Feel Like It. Leah will put links to those in the show notes for you, and this is a great place to remind you about the bi-weekly Latest Lazy Listens email.

Latest Lazy Listens is an email that goes out every other Friday with summaries, points, bonus resources, and extra words from me about our most recent episodes. It's like a podcast digest, and it's so helpful. So in this next one, I'll share some additional companion episodes that are good for this process as well as a couple of apps that could be helpful in tracking those hard to remember or schedule tasks. I'll also share how I personally handle household tasks that sneak up on me, that I see need to be done, and my approach to making sure they do. Lots of goodness in that email, so if you're interested in getting it, you can click the link in the show notes or go to thelazygeniuscollective.com/listens.

Before we go, let's celebrate the Lazy Genius of the Week. This week it's Quincy Wyatt which is like the raddest name. Quincy Wyatt?! Can solve crimes for me and then also make me homemade bread after? Such a good name. Anyway, here's Quincy's message. "Kendra, I just wanted to let you know a great way your book The Lazy Genius Kitchen has helped me immensely do what matters to me. Two things matter to me in the kitchen: making new things and not wasting food. Enter Soup Sunday with your latest book. Every Sunday, I clean out my fridge of old veggies, half opened bags of grains and beans etc. Then I turn to the "Staple Ingredients of 9 Different Cuisines" section of your book. I look at what I have leftover and pick the cuisine that best matches. I then add in things from my pantry to support that cuisine. Then I follow your how to make soup guide that's in the book and mix up a bit vat of some new soup for the week. I love that this helps me be creative, as well as not waste, both of which matter to me. Thank you."

Holy moly, Quincy, I'm obsessed with this so much. What an amazing idea to support these two things that matter to you. I also love that you are using The Lazy Genius Kitchen in the exact way I hoped. That it's a resource that's versatile and can help you in lots of situations. I'm also so interested in all the soups you've made and how different they all might be. This is just such a fantastic idea, and I'm thrilled you shared it so congratulations on being the Lazy Genius of the Week!

Y'all, if you have not explored The Lazy Genius Kitchen, it is a book that can really transform your life in your kitchen. It helps you cook, it helps you organize, it helps you plan, it helps you gather. Namely it just helps name what matters to you in multiple areas and then provides a path to figuring out a solution. Plus the whole back third is full of single pages like staple ingredients of 9 different cuisines and how to make soup and how to feed a crowd and the liquid index that helps you code-break so many recipes and adjust to fit your own life. It's just such a great book, so if you haven't picked it up, I encourage you to check it out. Grab it at the library and see if it's for you, and if it is, you want your own copy and you'll use it often like Quincy does. After she solves crimes in rural Maine.

Okay, that's it for today! Thanks so much for listening, and until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!