

ECO & SNUG

The Dopamine Menus

Four seasons of small good things, for the days when you
can't think of one.

GROWN-UPS AND CHILDREN · EIGHT MENUS · PRINT AT HOME

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How to use these

A dopamine menu is a list of things that genuinely lift you, written down in advance, while you still have the wherewithal to think of them. You make it on a good day so that it's waiting for you on a bad one.

1 Print it and put it where you'll see it

The fridge, the back of a door, inside a cupboard you open every day. A menu in a drawer is a menu you've never read.

2 It's a menu, not a list

You are not meant to do all of it. You are meant to *pick one*. Nobody feels guilty about the puddings they didn't order.

3 The point is that it thinks for you

When you're flat, the problem isn't that there's nothing good to do. It's that you cannot bring a single good thing to mind. That's the bit this fixes.

4 Match the course to what you've actually got

Nothing left? Starters. Twenty minutes in the car park? Starters. A free hour and a following wind? Have a main.

5 Desserts stay on the menu

Scrolling isn't a moral failure, it's a pudding. It tastes good and it doesn't feed you. Writing it down where you can see it does more than banning it ever has.

6 There is nothing to tick

No streak, no chart, no score. The day you miss is not a day you've failed, and this is the reason most charts end up face down on top of the microwave.

That's the whole method. The next eight pages are mine and my family's, to get you started — the last two are blank, because the menu that works is the one with your own things on it.



Autumn

for grown-ups

Dark by five, everything damp, and the year asking you to slow down before you're ready.

Starters

two minutes or less

Big light off, lamp on

To the end of the garden and back

The first hot drink of the day, sitting down

One song, loud, while the kettle goes

The warmest pair of socks you own

Open a window for sixty seconds, then shut it

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Podcast on while you do the washing up

Radio on while you cook

A candle lit while you clear one surface

Phone left in another room for the school run

A jumper on instead of the heating on

Mains

half an hour or more

Bake something that makes the whole house smell of it

A long bath with no clock anywhere near you

Walk somewhere with trees. No destination

Batch cook one thing for the freezer

A film under a blanket in the afternoon

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

A proper bonfire

Conkers and a long walk on a dry Saturday

A pumpkin each, carved badly

Drive somewhere with a view and take flasks

Breakfast out somewhere warm on a cold morning

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Scrolling

A fourth episode

An online basket you're not going to buy

Picking the phone up halfway through the film

Desserts are on the menu on purpose. They're lovely and you're allowed them. They just don't fill you up — so have one *after* a main, not instead of one.

Autumn

for children



Read it out and let them choose. Choosing is half of it.

Starters

two minutes or less

Jump in the biggest pile of leaves you can find

Find five conkers

Choose which lamp goes on tonight

Stamp in a puddle on purpose

Smell three things out of the spice cupboard

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Pick the music for tea time

Wellies on indoors. Why not

Hold the torch while the curtains get shut

Choose the bedtime story by its cover

Mains

half an hour or more

Leaf hunt — one of every colour, stuck down

Make the pudding and lick the spoon

Den under the table with torches

Paint a pumpkin instead of carving it

Welly walk in the rain, then hot chocolate

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Bonfire night

Pick your own pumpkin

The woods with a flask

Stay up to watch it go dark

Collect a basket of sticks for the fire

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Tablet or telly

One more go on the game

Sweets

YouTube on the big telly

One dessert after one main. That's the deal.

Winter

for grown-ups



The hardest one. Everything is further away and costs more effort, so the starters matter most.

Starters

two minutes or less

Light the first candle of the evening

Five minutes outside in the cold, then back in to the warm

One tangerine, peeled slowly

Write down tomorrow's three things

Hot water bottle in the bed at eight so it's warm at ten

Clean sheets on, before you need them

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Audiobook on while you sort the washing

Lamps only for the whole evening. No ceiling light

Something stewing on the hob while you do everything else

Mains

half an hour or more

Soup from scratch, bread to go with it

A jigsaw left out on the table all week

Ring someone who knew you before all this

A cold walk in the brightest hour — eleven till two

Empty one drawer completely and don't stop halfway

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Lights somewhere — a town, a garden, anywhere lit up

An indoor swim on the coldest day of the year

A day with nothing in it, booked in like an appointment

A long drive with the heater on and the good music

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Scrolling

A fourth episode

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Winter

for children



Short days, long evenings. Most of this happens indoors and that's fine.

Starters

two minutes or less

Breathe on the cold window and draw in it

Put your pyjamas on the radiator for later

Find the squashiest blanket in the house

Count how many stars you can see out of the door

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Choose the pudding

Fairy lights on while you have your tea

Dressing gown over your clothes all morning

Choose tomorrow's socks tonight

Mains

half an hour or more

Build the biggest den in the house

Decorate biscuits. Eat the broken ones

Torch shadows on the bedroom wall

Paper chains, miles of them

A film with all the lights off and a duvet on the sofa

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Go and see the lights

Swimming when it's freezing outside

Sledging, or the hill anyway, in case

Bake something for someone else and take it round

Feed the birds every day for a week

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Tablet or telly

One more go on the game

Sweets

YouTube on the big telly

One dessert after one main. That's the deal.

Spring

for grown-ups



The one where the lift is free if you go outside and take it.

Starters

two minutes or less

Every curtain open the second you're up

Two minutes standing in the sun

Cut something green and put it in a jar

Go out and smell the air after it's rained

Shake the doormat out and sweep the step

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Window open while you work

Washing on the line instead of the rack

Walk the long way round to the car

Breakfast by the window instead of standing up

Mains

half an hour or more

Plant something from seed. Cheap, and it keeps paying

Clear one patch of garden properly

The first walk of the year without a coat

Wash the windows. Sounds grim, feels incredible

Go somewhere you've never been, within ten miles

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

A car boot sale, or a plant sale

A day out on the first warm Saturday

Repaint one thing you look at every day

Book one thing for the summer, however small

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Spring

for children



Everything is coming back. Let them find it rather than telling them about it.

Starters

two minutes or less

Find the first daffodil

Look under a stone and see what's under there

Blow a dandelion

Bare feet on the grass for ten seconds

Stop and listen for the first bee

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Help hang the washing out

Window open at bedtime to hear the birds

Wellies by the door, ready

Mains

half an hour or more

Plant a seed in a pot with your name on it

Puddle walk, then dry socks

Make a bug hotel out of sticks

Draw the whole pavement in chalk

Collect six different leaves and work out which tree

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Go and see lambs

The park with a picnic, even if it's a bit cold

Pick your own flowers

Wash the car and get completely soaked

Fly a kite on a windy day

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Tablet or telly

One more go on the game

Sweets

YouTube on the big telly

One dessert after one main. That's the deal.

Summer

for grown-ups



Long evenings are the whole gift. Use them before the kids' bedtime eats them.

Starters

two minutes or less

Barefoot on the grass

A cold drink, outside, standing up, two minutes

Face in the sun with your eyes shut

Pick one thing from the garden and eat it there

Hang the washing out and stand there while you do it

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Eat outside. Every meal you can get away with

Music out of the kitchen window while you cook

Go to bed while it's still light

Mains

half an hour or more

Swim in something outdoors

Eat somewhere with a view. Sandwiches count

A long walk after the children have gone down

Read outside until the light goes

Cook over a fire

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

A whole day out with no route planned

The coast, however far it is

Camp in the garden

Watch the sun go down somewhere on purpose

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Summer

for children



Six weeks is a long time. Keep this one on the fridge.

Starters

two minutes or less

Run through a sprinkler or a hose

Find a ladybird

Ice lolly outside, no plate, no telling off

Lie on the grass and find a shape in the clouds

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Breakfast in the garden

Paddling pool on while the grown-ups do jobs

Choose the picnic

Eat your tea in the garden

Mains

half an hour or more

Mud kitchen. Properly mucky

Water fight. Grown-ups have to join in

Build an obstacle course and time each other

Paint something enormous outside

Stay up late and look for bats

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

A whole day at the seaside

Camping in the garden

A river or a lake with a net

Sleep with the curtains open

A barbecue you get to help with

Desserts *lovely, but don't start here*

Tablet or telly

One more go on the game

Sweets

YouTube on the big telly

One dessert after one main. That's the deal.

Your menu

for grown-ups

Fill this in on a good day. Be specific — ‘walk’ is a chore, ‘the footpath behind the church’ is a plan.

Starters

two minutes or less

Sides

alongside something you’re already doing

Mains

half an hour or more

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Desserts *lovely, but don’t start here*

Write the desserts down too. Naming them is what stops them eating the evening.

Your menu

for children

Let them dictate it and write it down in their words, spelling and all. They'll use one they made.

Starters

two minutes or less

Sides

alongside something you're already doing

Mains

half an hour or more

Specials

needs a dry day, a bit of planning or a few quid

Desserts

lovely, but don't start here

Write the desserts down too. Naming them is what stops them eating the evening.

IF THIS HELPED

There's a whole system behind it

The menus are one page out of the thing I actually built, which is an operating system for a household that runs on ADHD — mine, my husband's and our children's.

The ADHD Operating System

The Code Word Map, so a child can tell you they're overwhelmed without having the words. Safe Mode, for the days the house can't run normally. A twenty-eight day reset you can start on any day of the week, including a Wednesday in February.

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We're not at the calm house yet, in case you were wondering. I'm building this in the mess so that one day we get the quiet.