

The dishes take four minutes

A short book about why you put off housework, and how to stop

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

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Before you start

This book is short on purpose. You can read it in an evening.

Most of it is about why you put housework off. Only the last third is about what to do. I chose that order because you've already tried the tips. You've had the chore chart, the app, and the new cleaning spray that was going to change things. My guess is that they failed because they were fighting a belief you still held, and the belief won. So we'll look at the beliefs first.

You don't need to change anything while you read. You also don't need to wait. If you feel like washing a cup halfway through chapter 3, go and wash it. The book will be here when you get back.

I have one request. A few chapters ask you to check something in your own home, with a timer or just by paying attention. Please do those. I can argue with you for pages, and ten seconds of your own evidence will beat all of it.

The pile on the chair

There's a chair in your bedroom that stopped being a chair some time ago. It holds the clothes that are too clean for the wash and too worn for the wardrobe, and the pile has been there long enough to have layers. In the kitchen a pan is soaking. It has been soaking since Tuesday, and you both know the soaking finished on Tuesday night.

You walk past these things many times a day. Each time there's a small flinch, a half-second of "I should deal with that", and then a quieter thought that says "not now". You keep walking and the flinch fades. An hour later you pass the pan again and the whole exchange repeats.

I want to start by saying what this isn't. You don't have a knowledge problem. You know how to wash a pan. You don't have a caring problem either, because people who don't mind mess don't feel the flinch, and they don't read books like this one. The mess bothers you. You'd like a home where you can open the door to a neighbour without a quick scan of the hallway first.

You've probably noticed the strangest part already. You spend more time thinking about the pan than it would take to wash it. Across a week, the thinking might add up to an hour of low-grade discomfort, spent on a job that takes a few minutes. Nobody would choose that trade on purpose. You make it every day, and so do a great many other people.

So something is making the trade look good in the moment. That something is what this book is about.

My argument is simple. Putting off housework is a habit, and it's a separate thing from housework itself. The habit survives because it pays you something each time you use it. The payment is real, but it's small, and it comes with a charge you've stopped noticing. When you see both clearly, the habit loses much of its pull, and the practical advice that never worked before has a far better chance.

I can't promise you'll come to love hoovering. Hardly anyone does. What I think you can have is a home that gets looked after in small daily amounts, and evenings where the kitchen isn't sitting in the corner of your mind.

A word on who this is for. I'm writing for an adult who is able to do the housework and keeps not doing it. If your limit is illness, disability, a newborn, or plain exhaustion from a life with too much in it, then your problem is capacity. No change of attitude creates hours or energy that don't exist. Some of this book will still help, and chapter 11 speaks to you directly, but please don't read the rest as a charge sheet.

What "later" buys you

Picture a normal weekday. You come home, drop your bag, and walk into the kitchen. Breakfast things are on the counter, last night's pots are in the sink, and the bin is full enough that the lid sits at an angle. Your mood drops a little.

Then you think, "I'll sort it after dinner." And your mood comes back up.

Look closely at that second moment, because the whole habit turns on it. Nothing in the kitchen changed. The pots are still there. What changed is how you feel, and it changed at once, for free, just because you thought a sentence. That lift is what "later" buys you.

Two psychologists who study procrastination, Fuschia Sirois and Timothy Pynchyl, have argued that this is a large part of what procrastination is. In their account, people who put things off are managing a mood. The task brings up an unpleasant feeling, such as boredom, dread or resentment, and postponing the task removes the feeling quickly. Feeling better now takes priority, and the bill goes to your future self.

I find that account persuasive because it explains why tips and charts barely dent the habit. A habit that gets rewarded within one second, every time, is going to be sturdy. It also explains why you aren't stupid for having it. Your mind found a fast way to stop an unpleasant feeling, and kept using it.

Now the charge. With most postponed tasks, out of sight helps a bit. A tax form in a drawer can stay quiet for days. Housework can't, because you live inside the to-do list. The sink is on the way to the kettle. The laundry basket is beside the bed. Every time you pass one of them the unpleasant feeling returns, and you have to buy relief again with another "later".

So count what you're getting. The relief lasts until the next time you see the job, which at home might be twenty minutes. And the discomfort you keep relieving is produced by the postponed job. A person who washed the pots after dinner has nothing to feel relieved about. They just have an evening.

It works much like the snooze button. You press it and get nine more minutes in bed, which sounds like a gift. But you spend those minutes half awake, waiting for the alarm, and they're worse than either sleeping or getting up.

There's a fair objection here. Sometimes "later" is just sensible scheduling. If you think "I'll Hoover on Saturday morning" and on Saturday morning you Hoover, that's a plan, and plans are good. The two are easy to tell apart. A plan has a time attached and you trust yourself to keep it, so the matter feels settled and leaves your mind. The habit version has no time attached, part of you knows it, and the chore is back in your thoughts within the hour.

For the next day or two, you don't need to do anything differently. Just catch the moment when it happens. Notice the flinch, the word "later", and the small lift that follows. Then notice how long the lift

lasts before you see the job again. You're checking my claim against your own kitchen, and that's the only evidence that will matter to you.

Waiting to feel like it

Ask most people why the bathroom hasn't been cleaned and you'll hear some version of "I haven't felt up to it." The plan, if you can call it one, is to wait for a day when the energy and the mood arrive together, and to clean then.

The belief is reasonable because you have evidence for it. You remember days when you felt like it. Maybe it was a bright Saturday in spring when you opened the windows and went through the whole flat, and it was almost enjoyable. Cleaning was easy that day. So you concluded that mood is the key ingredient, and that on the other days you lack it.

Go back over one of those days in detail, though, and the order of events is often different from how you remember it. Take the hour before visitors arrive. You don't feel like cleaning. You start because you have to, grumbling, with the hallway. Twenty minutes later you're wiping the skirting boards, which no visitor in history has inspected. At some point the mood turned up, and it turned up after you started.

I think this is the common pattern. The feeling of wanting to do a job follows the first few minutes of doing it more often than it comes before. If that's right, waiting for the mood means waiting for something that gets produced by the thing you're waiting to do. You can check it. Next time you start a job you didn't want, notice how you feel two minutes in, and compare that with how you felt at the door.

It helps to see where the reluctance sits. It isn't spread evenly across the job. Nearly all of it is packed into the start. The worst moment of washing up is the ten seconds before the tap runs. Once your hands are in warm water, the experience is neutral at worst, and some people find it quietly pleasant. A large part of what you've been avoiding all week turns out to be those ten seconds.

Then there's tiredness. You work, you may have children, and at eight in the evening you're tired in a way that's real. I'm not going to tell you the tiredness is imaginary.

But two different feelings both get called tired. One is physical depletion, where your body needs rest. The other is the heavy, sinking feeling that arrives when you face a job you don't want. The second feels exactly like fatigue, and it has one telltale feature. It lifts fast when something appealing appears. If a friend rang right now with a good invitation, would you find the energy? It's a rough test, and it won't tell you anything about illness. But if the answer is yes, a good part of what you're feeling is reluctance. If it's no, you're worn out, and you should rest without guilt. Chapter 7 is about how to do that properly.

So the question you've been asking yourself is the wrong one. "Do I feel like cleaning the bathroom?" will get a no for the rest of your life, and that's fine, because you don't need a yes. The question that matters is much smaller. "Am I willing to pick up the cloth?" You can be willing to do ten seconds of almost anything.

The job in your head

There are two versions of every chore. One is in the sink. The other is in your head, and the one in your head is the one you've been refusing to do.

In your head, "clean the kitchen" is a grey block of effort with no clear edges. It feels like an hour, maybe the whole evening. So of course you don't start it at seven on a Wednesday.

I'd like you to run a small test, and it's the most important exercise in the book. Pick a chore you've been putting off. Before you start, write down how long you think it will take. Then set a timer on your phone, do the job at a normal pace, and look at the number.

I can't know your result, but I'll make a bet. Your guess was too high, and it may have been double. A sink of ordinary dishes for one or two people tends to land somewhere around four or five minutes, which is where this book got its title. Hanging a load of washing is in the same range. Making the bed takes about as long as reading this paragraph. Your numbers will be your own, and that's the reason to measure them.

If I lose the bet and the job took longer than you guessed, the test has still done its work. You now have a number. A job that takes eleven minutes has a start and an end, which the grey block never had, and you can decide where eleven minutes fits in your evening. Write your numbers down somewhere, because we'll use them in chapter 7.

So why does the version in your head get so big? I think it's because every postponement adds something to it. Each time you pass the sink, flinch and walk on, a little guilt gets attached to the job. After a week you aren't facing a sink of dishes. You're facing a sink of dishes, plus seven days of guilt, plus the small humiliation of having avoided something so minor. The dishes weigh what they always weighed. The rest of the load is what you've been dreading, and it disappears the moment the job is done.

I should be honest that some of the growth is physical too. Porridge that rinses off in five seconds at breakfast needs scrubbing by evening. Washing left damp in the machine needs washing again. And mess invites mess. A clear sink tends to stay clear, while a single bowl in it acts as permission for every other bowl in the house. So delay raises the real price as well as the imagined one. Whatever the job costs right now, that's the cheapest it will ever be.

Some jobs really are big, of course. The oven. The garage. The box of unopened post. That's true, and timing them won't shrink them to four minutes. Big jobs need a different approach, which is to put a limit on the session instead of on the job, and chapter 9 covers it. But notice where your daily discomfort comes from. It's rarely the garage. It's the small jobs that come round every day, and those are the ones your head inflates the most.

"I'm just a messy person"

After enough years of this, you need an explanation, and the one most people reach for is character. I'm lazy. I'm a slob. I'm just not a tidy person. My sister got the tidy gene.

It sounds like honesty, even humility. It's also strangely comfortable, and it's worth seeing why. If the mess is caused by who you are, then there's nothing to be done, and you can stop trying. The label hurts, but it also excuses.

The trouble is that it doesn't fit the facts. Laziness, if it means anything, means a general unwillingness to make an effort, and yours isn't general. You hold down a job, or raise children, or both. You meet deadlines. You've probably pushed through things far harder than a laundry basket, like exams, house moves and long shifts. A flaw that only shows up in front of the ironing is a poor candidate for a character trait. It looks much more like a habit with a specific trigger.

For some people the trigger has a history. Maybe chores were a punishment in your house. Maybe someone inspected your work and redid it with a sigh, or a parent kept standards that nobody could meet. If housework was the place where you got judged as a child, it makes sense that an unmade bed still brings a faint sense of being in trouble, and that you'd want to get away from that feeling fast. I can't know if this applies to you. If it does, it's worth knowing that the dread belongs to then, and the bed is just a bed.

The label is inaccurate, and it also makes things worse. Go back to chapter 2. The habit of "later" runs on bad feeling. The job makes you feel bad, and postponing it makes the feeling stop. Now add the label. You see the mess, you call yourself lazy, you feel worse, and the pull towards "later" gets stronger because there's more bad feeling to escape. Calling yourself names feeds the exact habit you're trying to stop. Sirois has found, across four groups of people, most of them students, that those who procrastinate more also tend to be harsher with themselves and more stressed. That kind of study can't show which causes which, but it fits the loop I've just described.

The objection I'd expect is this. "If I go easy on myself, I'll do even less. Being hard on myself is the only thing that gets me moving." I understand the fear, but check it against your own record. You've been hard on yourself for years. If it worked, the chair in the bedroom would be a chair.

Dropping the insult doesn't mean dropping the standard. You can want a clean kitchen, and mean it, while declining to abuse yourself over a dirty one. The two were never connected. One is a preference about your home. The other is a way of talking to yourself that you picked up somewhere.

So here's a more accurate description to replace the label. You're a capable person with a long-practised habit of postponing one category of task. You built the habit through repetition, without ever deciding to. Repetition can take it apart too, and this time you get to decide.

Properly or not at all

Here's a plan you may recognise. The house has got away from you, so you decide that on Saturday you'll do the whole thing. Top to bottom, properly, with the good cloths. Because Saturday is coming, there's no sense in doing bits before then, and so Thursday's dishes wait for Saturday too.

Saturday comes. You have a slow start, the job looks enormous, and a friend suggests lunch. The plan moves to Sunday, and then to next weekend.

This belief flatters you, which is part of its appeal. "If I can't do it properly, I won't do it at all" sounds like high standards. But look at what the standard does in practice. It sets an entry price of three free hours and full energy. You almost never have those, and when you do, you want to spend them on something else. A standard that stops all work is doing the job of an excuse.

The plan also rests on a mistake about what housework is. It treats cleaning as a project with a finish line, after which the house is Done. But a home in use gets dirty at a steady rate. There's no finished state to reach, only upkeep, and upkeep works in small regular amounts. Think of brushing your teeth. Nobody skips it all week because they're planning a really thorough session on Sunday.

Once you see it as upkeep, the partial job stops looking pointless. If you wipe the counter and leave the floor, you have a wiped counter. If you wash half the dishes, tomorrow's washing up is half the size.

If you put away only the clean clothes from the chair, the chair is holding a smaller pile. Each of those is a real improvement that you could have in the next five minutes.

"But the room still looks a mess afterwards, so what have I gained?" You've gained two things. The next session starts from a better position. And you've practised starting, which is the skill you're short of. You already know how to clean. What you haven't done much is begin without ceremony, do a bit, and stop.

Stopping deserves a mention, because the same belief causes trouble at the other end. Some people can't start a small tidy without it turning into a big one. You go to put a mug away, notice the state of the cupboard, and ninety minutes later you're sitting on the floor surrounded by every container you own. It feels productive. But your memory files the event under "tidying takes ninety minutes and wears me out", and next time the entry price has gone up again.

So a small job needs an end as well as a beginning. Wash the dishes, then leave the kitchen. The cupboard can have its own turn.

"I've earned a rest"

By now you might have a particular worry. If you stop putting things off, what happens to your evenings? You work hard. The sofa at the end of the day is one of the good things in your life, and this book seems to be coming for it.

It isn't. Rest is a real need, and I'd defend it against anyone who says a good person is always busy. What I'd question is the quality of the rest you're getting now.

Think about a typical evening with the kitchen undone. You're on the sofa with a series on. The kitchen is behind you, or through the doorway, and part of your attention stays on it all night. You get up for a drink and see the pots. You feel the flinch and sit back down. You are resting, technically, but it's the rest of someone with an unpaid bill on the table. Then at eleven you either do the dishes while tired and resentful, or you go to bed and meet them at breakfast.

Compare the other evening. You eat, you spend a few minutes on the kitchen while the food is still soft on the plates, and you sit down at half past seven with nothing waiting. It's the same sofa and the same series, and the evening feels quite different.

So the choice you've been making was never between chores and rest. The chores get done in both versions, because eventually you run out of bowls. You've been choosing between a short job followed by a clear evening, and a whole evening with the job

hanging over it, followed by the same job at a worse time. Doing it first costs you a few minutes of sitting down, and it buys back the rest of the evening.

The bigger fear is that a tidy home means a life of drudgery, where every spare minute goes to wiping something. This is where your numbers from chapter 4 come in. Add up the daily jobs. Dishes, a quick wipe of the kitchen, one load of washing moved along, the bed, ten minutes of putting things back where they live. I can't give you your total. I'd expect it to look small next to the space these jobs take up in your head. Whatever the figure is, remember that you're already paying it. You just pay late, with the dread added on top.

Some nights you'll have nothing left at all. Then rest, and do it properly, by making a decision. "I'm not doing the dishes tonight. I'll do them at eight tomorrow, before work." That's a plan with a time, as in chapter 2, and it lets you switch off. The dishes cost you the same either way. What drains you is the undecided state, where the job is neither done nor dismissed and you carry it around all evening.

One last thought. For some people, leaving chores undone is the only way they ever claim time for themselves, especially in a home where everyone else's needs come first. If that's you, the need is real, and you deserve a better way of meeting it. Take the time openly. "I'm reading for an hour and I'm not available" is better for you than an hour stolen from the ironing and spent feeling guilty.

"Why should I, when nobody else does?"

If you share your home, there may be another voice in the mix, and it's an angry one. "I did the bins last time. And the time before. If I do them again, that's just how it'll be." So the bins stay full, as a kind of protest.

The anger is often fair. In many households the work is split unevenly, and the person doing more has usually noticed long before the person doing less. I'm not going to tell you to rise above it and scrub cheerfully.

But look at how the protest performs. The message you're sending is "I refuse to carry this alone." The message received is a full bin, and the other person may honestly not notice a full bin. Tolerance for mess varies a lot between people, and the one with the higher tolerance can outlast you without knowing there's a contest. Meanwhile you live in the mess too, and it bothers you more than it bothers them. You're paying the full cost of a strike that management hasn't heard about.

It helps to split this into two problems, because they have different solutions.

The first is fairness, and the tool for it is a conversation, held at a calm time and kept specific. "You never help" starts an argument about character. "Can you take over the bins and the bathroom completely, so I never have to think about them?" is a proposal

someone can say yes to. Handing over whole jobs works better than asking for help with tasks. Someone who only helps still leaves you doing the noticing and the asking.

The second problem is your own habit of postponing, and that one is yours whatever happens in the conversation. Once it's clear which jobs are yours, doing them promptly costs you less than doing them late, for all the reasons in the chapters before this one.

"If I just get on with my share, they'll never change." Perhaps they won't, which is why the conversation matters and may need repeating. If it keeps going nowhere, you have a relationship problem that a book about housework can't fix, and it deserves attention in its own right. Leaving the bins won't solve it either.

If you live alone, the same belief shows up in a different form. "Nobody sees it, so who cares?" You see it. You wake up there every morning, and you count.

The decision

Everything so far has been about seeing the habit clearly. This chapter is about what to do, and it starts with one decision that the rest depends on.

Think about where the effort goes when you put something off. Very little goes into the chore, since you aren't doing it. Most goes into negotiation. Each time you see the job, you hold a small hearing in your head about whether to do it now, with arguments on both sides, and "later" wins. You might hold thirty of these hearings a day. They're tiring, and they're the part that spoils your evening.

The decision is to stop holding hearings about small jobs. You don't decide each time. You decide once, now, and after that the question is closed. Here's what that looks like in practice. If your home is a long way gone, read to the end of the chapter before you begin, because a backlog gets its own method.

Small jobs get done when you notice them. Small means anything you've timed at under about five minutes. The cup goes in the dishwasher and not beside it. The coat goes on the hook. The hob gets wiped while it's still warm. You notice it, you do it, and there's no hearing. If you really can't, because you're halfway out of the door, give the job a time once, "when I get in", and go. That's a plan, as in chapter 2, and it's only a plan if you keep it. I'd say this one rule covers most of what makes a home feel out of control.

Bigger jobs get a time and a limit. "Bathroom, Saturday at ten, for twenty minutes." The time turns a vague "later" into a plan, so it stops nagging. The limit matters just as much, because it makes starting cheap. You're agreeing to twenty minutes, and when they're up you're allowed to stop, even if the job isn't finished. The oven, the garage and the box of post all get done this way, in limited sessions, and none of them needs a free weekend.

Routine jobs get attached to things that already happen. The psychologist Peter Gollwitzer has spent decades studying plans in the form "when X happens, I will do Y". Across many studies, people who make them follow through more often than people who only hold a good intention. The reason fits everything in this book. The plan makes the decision in advance, so the moment itself doesn't ask you for one. "When I switch the kettle on in the morning, I empty the dishwasher or the drying rack." "When I get out of the shower, I wipe the basin." "When I take my work clothes off, they go in the basket or back on a hanger." Pick events that happen every day without fail.

When you feel the flinch, make the first physical move. Don't argue with the thought, and don't wait for willingness to grow. Pick up the cloth or turn on the tap. You've agreed to ten seconds, as in chapter 3, and you're free to stop after that. You mostly won't, because the hard part will be behind you.

Done means it has stopped bothering you. It doesn't mean a show home. If the bathroom is clean enough that you no longer wince when you walk in, it's done.

Then make all of this physically easier. A lot of mess is a storage problem that looks like a character problem. The clothes pile up on the chair because the wardrobe is one step too awkward, so put hooks on the back of the door. Keep a cloth and a spray in the bathroom, so that wiping the basin doesn't begin with a trip to the kitchen. Put a bin in every room where rubbish appears. Wherever things keep landing, that's probably where their home should be.

If your house is a long way gone right now, don't try to run these rules on top of the backlog. Clear the backlog first, in limited sessions of twenty or thirty minutes. Start with rubbish, because it's the quickest visible change, then dishes, then laundry. Begin in the place you look at most, which for many people is the kitchen counter or the bed. The order that makes you feel better fastest is the right order.

You don't need to wait for Monday, or the first of the month, or the end of this book. Choose one "when X, I will Y" plan for tomorrow morning. Then find one small job within sight of where you're sitting, and go and do it before you read the next chapter.

When "later" comes back

At some point in the next few days, you'll look at a dirty pan and hear the old thought, clear as ever. "I'll do it later." You might feel a flash of disappointment, as if the book should have removed it.

It won't have, and nothing has gone wrong. You've practised that thought for years, many times a day. It's going to keep turning up for a while out of sheer momentum. What's changed is that you now know what it is. It's an offer. It was never an order, and you don't have to take it.

It helps to know the forms the offer comes in. "After this episode." "It's only one cup." "I've had a long day." "I'll do it properly at the weekend." "I'll just sit down for five minutes first." Each one sounds like a fresh and reasonable thought about tonight's circumstances. Each one is selling the same product, which is a few minutes of relief, charged back to you all evening.

When you hear one, keep your response short. Notice it, maybe name it to yourself, "there's the later thought", and then make the first physical move. What you shouldn't do is debate. It's nine at night, you're tired, and the other side is arguing for the sofa and has had years to prepare its case. You'll lose the debate, and you don't need to win it. You only need to walk to the sink while it's still going on.

The pull won't be even. It'll be strongest at particular moments, and for many people those are coming home, the end of a meal, and Sunday evening. Those are the places to put a "when X, I will Y"

plan from chapter 9, so that the weak moment already has a decision waiting in it.

I can't promise the thought disappears. What I'd expect is that it gets weaker as your own evidence builds. Every time you do the job straight away and then notice that the evening is clear, the claim that "later" is the comfortable option loses a bit of credit. After enough of those the offer still arrives, and it just doesn't sound like much of a deal.

Two smaller points. You don't have to enjoy any of this. Some chores are dull and will stay dull. The aim was only ever that they be small and finished instead of large and pending.

And I'd be careful with streaks and tracking apps. If ticking a box pleases you, tick away. But a streak has a weakness, which is that one missed day breaks it, and a broken streak makes a fine excuse to give up entirely. You're after a home that works, and that doesn't depend on an unbroken run.

Bad weeks

There will be a week when it all slides. You'll get the flu, or work will eat your evenings, or a child will stop sleeping, and by Friday the kitchen will look the way it used to.

This is normal, and it's mostly about capacity. Homes get messy when the people in them are stretched, and that's true of the tidiest person you know. A rough week tells you nothing about your character.

The mess itself is the smaller risk. The bigger one is the story you might tell about it. "See, I'm back to square one. It never sticks with me." That's the label from chapter 5 trying to move back in, and it's wrong on the facts. You can't go back to square one, because you know things now that you didn't know then. You know how long the dishes take. You know what "later" costs. A messy house after a hard week is a messy house, and it's fixable in the usual way.

The usual way is one limited session, today, on the surface you see most. Twenty minutes on the kitchen, then stop. Tomorrow the normal rules pick up again. Whatever you do, don't schedule a Great Restoration for Saturday. That's chapter 6 all over again, and it pushes four days of dishes onto a day that may not go to plan.

Once things are steady, it's worth asking what slipped first. Often it's one anchor. The morning dishwasher routine broke when you were ill, the dishes backed up, the counter filled, and the rest followed. Find that first link and put it back before anything else.

Sometimes the problem is bigger than a habit, and I want to be plain about that. If the housework has piled up alongside weeks of low mood, poor sleep, or a loss of interest in things you usually enjoy, please talk to a doctor. Depression makes ordinary tasks feel enormous, and a change of perspective won't fix that on its own. If you've struggled all your life to start and finish tasks, organise your time and stop losing things like keys and your phone, at work as well as at home, it may be worth asking about an ADHD assessment. And if you find it very hard to throw things away, to the point that rooms can't be used for their purpose, that's a recognised difficulty with proper treatments, and a doctor is the place to start.

Getting help fits with everything in this book. That includes practical help. If you can afford a cleaner and want one, hire one without apology. It won't make you a failure, and you'll still need the small daily habits between visits.

The next ten minutes

You've reached the end, so here's what I'd like you to do with it.

Put the book down and find the small job that's been bothering you most. It should be one of the things you've walked past all week. Guess how long it'll take, start a timer, and do it.

Then stand in the room for a moment, and pay attention to how the room looks and how you feel. I'd expect a small, quiet relief. It's different from the relief that "later" gives you, because this one doesn't wear off when you next walk past. That's the evidence this whole book has been pointing at, and it's better that you collect it yourself than take my word for it.

After that, choose tomorrow's plan. One sentence is enough. "When I switch the kettle on, I'll empty the dishwasher." Add a second plan next week if the first one has settled in, and stay with one if it hasn't.

You'll still put things off sometimes. Everyone does, including people with immaculate homes. The difference is that you'll know what you're buying when you do it, and what it costs, and most days you won't think it's worth the money.

The pan has soaked long enough. Go and wash it.

Notes

The account of procrastination as short-term mood repair in chapter 2 comes from Fuschia Sirois and Timothy Pychyl, "Procrastination and the priority of short-term mood regulation: consequences for future self", *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2013, volume 7, pages 115 to 127.

The finding in chapter 5 that people who procrastinate more tend to be harsher with themselves and more stressed is from Fuschia Sirois, "Procrastination and stress: exploring the role of self-compassion", *Self and Identity*, 2014, volume 13, pages 128 to 145. It reports four samples, three of undergraduates and one of adults from the community. The study is correlational, so it shows a link and not a cause.

The "when X, I will Y" plans in chapter 9 are known in the research as implementation intentions. The review I relied on is Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 2006, volume 38, pages 69 to 119.

Everything else in this book is my own reasoning and interpretation, and you should test it against your own experience, as the exercises ask you to.

This book is general information and is no substitute for medical or psychological care.