

The treat that became the habit

A short book about rewarding yourself daily for getting
through the day

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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 is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is giving yourself something at the end of every day and calling it a treat. What the something is varies. A glass of wine at six. A bar of chocolate once the children are down. An order placed on a bad Tuesday. The takeaway that was Friday's and is now Thursday's as well. The next episode. The phone in bed. A cigarette on the step, or the vape, "as a treat". What doesn't vary is what gets said with it. I've earned it. I deserve this. I need this. And what doesn't vary is that it happens every day, whatever the day was like.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the daily treat makes sense from the inside. The day was long, there was nothing in it that was for you, and here's something that is. The second is that a reward given every day regardless of the day isn't a reward any more. It's a routine, and a routine can't do the job a reward does, because a reward marks a day out from other days and the daily marks nothing. Most of what it now gives you is the relief of its arriving, and "I've earned it" is found after the decision, not before it, which is why it gets said on every day and never once turns you down. The third is practical. You can tell a chosen treat from one that just arrived, and there are two ways out that both work. Keep the treat and drop the story, or keep the story and make the treat rare enough to be true. Chapters 17 to 21 cover how.

This isn't a book against pleasure. It won't tell you to give up wine or chocolate or television, and it doesn't think you should feel bad about any of them. It's about the daily, the one that comes at the

same hour whether you earned it or not, and what it's quietly stopped doing for you.

Three cautions, and they matter more in this book than in most.

If your treat is alcohol and it's every day, read chapter 22 before you change anything. The NHS says that someone who has become physically dependent on alcohol can come to harm by stopping overnight, and should get advice from a GP about how to cut down and whether medicine is needed. If you drink most days and the thought of a day without it makes you anxious, or you've noticed shaking or sweating in the morning, that's a conversation with a GP first and this book second.

If your treat is food and eating feels out of your control, or you eat and then try to undo it, or you spend much of the day thinking about your weight and shape, that isn't this book. The NHS says to see a GP as soon as you can, and the charity Beat has a helpline.

And if the reason the treat is the only good thing in your day is that nothing has felt good for weeks, most of the day, most days, the NHS says to see a GP. Chapter 15 is about the empty day, but an empty fortnight is something else.

Smoking and vaping have their own books in this series, The cigarette does nothing and The vape in your pocket, and if that's your treat those books say what this one can't.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

Six o'clock, and the same as yesterday

It's ten to six. You're in, or nearly in, and there's a small pull towards a cupboard or a fridge or a drawer that has nothing to do with hunger. The day is done, or done enough, and the thing that says so is a glass. You pour it. The first mouthful is good, and the second is fine, and by the third you're not really tasting it, you're just holding it, and the evening has begun. You'd have poured it if the day had been dreadful. You'd have poured it if the day had been the best in a month. You poured it yesterday, and you'll pour it tomorrow, and if anyone asked you'd say you'd earned it, and you'd mean it.

Or it's a bar of chocolate, once the children are finally down, eaten standing at the counter in about ninety seconds while looking at your phone. Or it's the app, on a Tuesday that went badly, and something on its way that you'll have forgotten ordering by the time it arrives. Or it's the episode, or the scroll in bed, or the cigarette on the back step. These are invented, but I'd guess yours is close. The thing changes. The shape doesn't. It arrives at the same hour, it takes the same form, and it comes with the same sentence.

Some words. **The treat** is whatever it is you give yourself, and I'm using your word for it. **The daily** is the treat when it comes every day, whatever the day was like. **The earning** is the sentence that comes with it, "I've earned it", or "I deserve this", or "I need this", which are the same sentence in different moods. **The expecting** is the stretch of the afternoon spent looking forward to it, and **the settling** is the moment it arrives and the expecting stops. **The flat**

evening is the evening without it. **A marker** is what a reward does, it marks a day out from the other days, and chapter 4 is about why the daily can't be one. **A proper treat** is one that's rare, chosen ahead of time and marks something, which chapter 20 is about. And **the hour** is the time of day the treat has claimed as its own.

Before you go on, do one thing, and give it a fortnight. Each day, write down the treat, and next to it write one letter. A C if you chose it, meaning that at some point before the hour you decided today would have one and could say why. An A if it arrived, meaning the hour came and the treat came with it and no decision was made that you can remember. Be honest about the A's. They aren't a fault. They're the subject of the book, and chapter 17 will want them.

Why the daily makes sense

Nobody sets out to have a glass of wine every night of the year. It starts as an occasional thing on a hard day, and then hard days are most days, and then the glass is there on the easy days too because six o'clock has learned to expect it. By the time you notice, it isn't a decision. It's the hour. It's worth being honest about what the daily gives you, because a habit that gave nothing wouldn't have survived a week.

It gives you an end to the day. Work stops, or the children stop, and the treat is the line under it, the thing that says the demanding part is over. It gives you a pleasure, and the pleasure is real, and I'm not going to pretend chocolate isn't nice or that the first mouthful of a cold glass isn't good. It gives you something that's for you, in a day that was mostly for other people. It gives you a small ritual, a shape to the evening that would otherwise be a shapeless stretch between getting in and going to bed. And it gives you the earning, the feeling of having been paid, which on some days is the only pay you'll get.

Underneath those there's a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That you've earned it. That it's a reward. That it's the best bit of your day. That it's only small. That you'd be miserable without it. That it's how you cope. That a bad day needs one. That taking it away would be punishing yourself. That it sets you up for tomorrow. Each has something true in it. Each is also doing the same job, which is making sure the treat arrives at six whatever kind of day it was, and that you don't look too closely at whether you wanted it.

The daily is an answer to real needs. An end to the day, a pleasure, something for you. This book isn't going to tell you those needs aren't real. It's going to ask whether the daily still meets them, because I don't think it does, and the research on rewards and habits points the same way. A reward that comes every day stops rewarding. What's left is the routine and the earning, and the earning is doing most of the work. Then it'll look at what the daily costs, which isn't mainly money or health. And then it'll give you a way to have treats again, which is a different thing from having the daily.

"I've earned it"

This is the sentence, and it's the one to start with because it's the most convincing. It's true, too, in its way. You did work. The day did take something out of you. Something at the end of it is a reasonable thing to want. The trouble isn't that the sentence is false. It's when it arrives.

Cat Taylor, Thomas Webb and Paschal Sheeran at Sheffield collected the reasons people give themselves for eating something they'd meant not to, and an earlier book in this series, *The biscuit tin*, uses their findings about biscuits. Deserving it came first on their list. The point I want from their work is a different one. A justification isn't a judgement made about the day and then acted on. It's a reason that's needed once the hand is already moving, and "I've earned it" is the reason that's always available, because every day contains some effort and effort is what the sentence runs on.

Ran Kivetz and Yuhuang Zheng at Columbia tested this more directly. They found that people justify giving themselves something they'd normally hold back from by two routes, and one of them is entitlement, the sense of having worked hard or done well. When they raised the effort a task took, or told people falsely that they'd done excellently, people chose the indulgent reward over the sensible one more often. The effect was larger in people who felt more guilty about indulging. That last part matters. The earning isn't a sign that you're relaxed about treats. It's what people who feel bad about treats need in order to have one.

Uzma Khan and Ravi Dhar found something similar with virtue rather than effort. Having made a virtuous choice first, people went on to choose the more self-indulgent option, and the effect vanished if the virtuous act could be put down to someone else's pressure. Researchers call this moral licensing. Irene Blanken, Niels van de Ven and Marcel Zeelenberg pooled 91 studies of it, with about seven thousand people, and found a real but modest effect, with the published studies larger than the unpublished ones. So it's not a law. It's a tendency, and it's the tendency the earning depends on.

Here's the thing to notice, and it's my reading rather than the researchers'. A verdict on the day would sometimes come back no. A judge who has never once turned down an application isn't judging. The earning is said on the day you finished the report and on the day you did nothing much, in the same words and with the same confidence, because it isn't measuring the day. It's licensing the treat, and it was always going to. Once you see that, the earning loses its authority without losing its truth. You did earn something. The question is whether the daily is it.

"It's a reward"

A reward is a good thing to give yourself, and I'm not going to argue against rewards. I'm going to argue that the daily has stopped being one, and the reason is in what a reward is for.

A reward marks. It says this day, or this piece of work, or this effort, was different from the others, and here's the sign of it. The marking is the whole point. A prize given to everyone in the room for turning up isn't a prize. It's a place setting. And a treat that arrives at six every day, on the day the report went in and on the day you watched the clock, is marking nothing, because it can't tell the days apart. It's the same glass either way.

Wendy Wood and Dennis R nger, reviewing the psychology of habit, describe habits as the efficient default mode of action, formed by repeating the same response in the same setting, and they note something that's worth sitting with. People tend to infer, from how often they do a thing, that they must have intended it. The frequency gets read backwards as a choice. Which is what's happened to the daily. It happens every day, so you conclude you must want it every day, so it must be a reward you're choosing. The habit produced the wanting, and then the wanting claimed to be the cause.

In an earlier study, Wood, Jeffrey Quinn and Deborah Kashy had people report every hour on what they were doing and thinking. When they were doing something habitual, meaning almost daily in a stable setting, their thoughts were usually elsewhere. When they were doing something they did less often, their thoughts were

on it. That's the test for whether the treat is still a reward. Where's your mind at six? If it's on the glass, on the taste of it and the pleasure of having it, it's a reward. If it's on the phone, or tomorrow, or nothing, and the glass is just what your hand does at six, it's a routine, and routines don't mark.

Think of a bell that rings every hour. After a week you don't hear it, and if it rang once on a Tuesday afternoon you'd stop and look up. The daily is the bell that rings every hour. The proper treat is the one that rings once.

None of this means you can't have a glass at six. It means that if you do, you should stop calling it a reward, because the word is doing something the glass no longer does. Chapter 18 comes back to this. You can keep the treat and drop the word. You can also keep the word and make the treat rare enough to earn it back.

"It's the best bit of my day"

It may be. If the day was a long run of things done for other people, the treat at the end of it can be the only stretch that's yours, and I'm not going to tell you it's nothing. What I'd ask is how much of the best bit is the treat, and how much is the looking forward to it.

Jeff Galak and Joseph Redden, reviewing what researchers call hedonic decline, describe the usual pattern. Repeated exposure to the same pleasant thing typically reduces the enjoyment of it, and they sort the reasons into three kinds, the body's feedback, changes in how the thing is perceived, and what people think about what they're doing. The third is the interesting one for the daily. Part of what wears a pleasure down is knowing you've had it, and knowing you'll have it again tomorrow. The glass on day three hundred can't taste the way the glass on day one did, not because the wine changed but because you did.

There's a second finding from a different field. Kent Berridge and colleagues, working mostly with animals, have argued that what looks like one thing, reward, is at least three things that come apart. Liking is the pleasure itself. Wanting is the pull towards a thing, which can be strong when the liking has faded. Learning is the link between a cue and the thing. Those are their terms, and how far the animal work carries to a person at six o'clock is a question I can't settle. But the shape is familiar. A cue, the hour. A strong wanting, all afternoon. A liking that lasts a mouthful and a half.

So here's my reading. The best bit of the day is real, and most of it is the wanting. It's the expecting, the stretch from about four o'clock when the treat comes into view, and the settling when it arrives. The treat itself is over quickly and mostly not attended to. If that's right, then what you'd lose by changing the daily isn't the best bit. It's the expecting, and chapter 12 is about what the expecting is really doing, and chapter 7 is about whether losing it is as bad as it sounds.

And if the treat is genuinely the best bit, taste and all, that's information too. It means the rest of the day has very little in it, and chapter 15 is about that, because a glass of wine can't fix an empty day and shouldn't be asked to.

"It's only small"

It is small. One glass. One bar. One order, which is a couple of taps. One episode. Small is why it's daily. Something large couldn't be daily, you'd notice it, and the daily works by being below the size at which you'd notice.

I'm not going to make this a health chapter, because that isn't the argument and you've heard it. But since the wine version is the commonest and the NHS has done the arithmetic, here it is once. The NHS defines a unit as ten millilitres of pure alcohol and gives a formula, the strength as a percentage times the volume in millilitres, divided by a thousand. A medium glass, 175 millilitres, of wine at thirteen per cent comes out at about 2.3 units by that sum. Seven of those a week is about sixteen. The NHS advises no more than fourteen a week on a regular basis, spread over three or more days, with drink-free days if you want to cut down. So one small glass a day, the one that's only small, is already over the line on its own, before the weekend. That's a count, not a lecture. If your treat isn't wine, do the equivalent count for what it is, and chapter 22 helps.

The size isn't really the point, though. The point is what small does to the story. Because the treat is small, it never has to be justified, so the earning is never examined. Because it's small, it can be added to without the sum ever looking large, one glass and then one glass and a top-up. Because it's small, a day without it looks petty, as though you were denying yourself a trifle, which makes the blank day in chapter 19 feel like an overreaction before you've

tried it. And because it's small, it's the perfect size to become a routine, since routines are made of small things done at the same hour.

The honest objection is that a small thing every day is what pleasure in ordinary life looks like, and a book that came for your one glass would be a mean book. I agree. This book isn't after the glass. It's after the daily, and the daily is a small thing that has stopped being a pleasure and become a place setting. The test isn't the size. It's whether you'd notice if it were missing, and what you'd notice. If the answer is a flat evening and nothing else, the thing you've been calling small has got quite large.

"I'd be miserable without it"

You'd be flat without it, for a while, and I'd rather say so than pretend. The first evening without the daily has a hole in it at six, and the hole is uncomfortable, and if you've tried it before you know that the discomfort is what sent you back. So the belief has evidence. What it doesn't have is a fair reading of the evidence.

Jordi Quoidbach and Elizabeth Dunn ran a small study that's worth knowing about. Participants ate a piece of chocolate in a lab session, then were sent away for a week, assigned by chance to one of three groups. One group was told to give up chocolate for the week. One was told to eat as much as they could. One was told nothing. A week later they came back and ate a piece of chocolate again. The people who'd given it up savoured it more than either of the other groups, and reported better mood afterwards. The people who'd eaten as much as they could enjoyed it least. The abstract doesn't give the number of people, and it was one week and one chocolate, so it's a small finding. But it's the right shape. A week without the treat didn't make the treat worse. It made it better.

What the flat evening is, then, is not what life without the treat is like. It's the expecting with nothing at the end of it. From about four o'clock the day has been leaning towards six, and at six there's nothing, and the lean has nowhere to go. That's uncomfortable in the way that an unanswered message is uncomfortable. It isn't the misery of a life without pleasure. It's a habit reaching for its cue and missing. And the lean fades, because it was learned and can be unlearned, which is the point of the blank day in chapter 19. The first one is flat. The fourth one is an evening.

There's a version of this belief that's more serious, and I don't want to pass it. If the treat is the only thing that makes any evening bearable, and that's been true for weeks, then the treat isn't the problem and removing it won't help. The preface says where to go, and it's a GP. But for most people reading this, the misery they're forecasting is the first flat evening, and they're forecasting it as permanent. It isn't. Quoidbach's chocolate-free week ended with the chocolate tasting better, and my guess is that the same goes for the glass, and for the episode, and for the rest.

"It's how I cope"

This one deserves more respect than the others, because it's often true. The day was stressful, the treat took the edge off, and you'd be worse company without it. There's a whole earlier book in this series about reaching for something the moment a feeling arrives, The feeling will pass without help, and I'll leave the mechanics of that to it. What I want to look at here is the word "cope", and what it means when it's daily.

Tanja Adam and Elissa Epel, reviewing the animal and human research on stress and eating, propose a model in which stress and pleasant food both release the body's own opioids, and the food's opioids damp down the stress response, so that eating under stress is, in a real sense, self-treatment. They also note that repeated stimulation of this loop, whether by stress or by the food, may lead to changes that make the eating harder to stop. That's a model, built largely on animal work, and the abstract is careful to say the human mechanisms are only starting to be understood. But take it at face value. It says the treat does something. It doesn't say the treat does anything about the stress.

That's the distinction. Coping with a thing and dealing with it are different. The glass copes with the day. It doesn't do anything to the day, which comes back tomorrow with the same shape, and gets the same glass. If the treat is how you cope, and it's daily, then there's a stress that's daily, and the treat has become the reason nobody has looked at it. Coping that's needed every day for a year isn't coping. It's maintenance on something that ought to be fixed or left.

I'd put it this way, and it's my view. The daily is a lid. It goes on at six and it keeps the day in, and the day is still in there. On the days when the stress is real and specific, a deadline, a difficult person, a worry, the lid is fair enough, and you can still choose it. On the days when there's nothing much under the lid, the lid goes on anyway, because that's what the hour does. And on the days when there's something under it that needs looking at, the lid is the one thing standing between you and looking. Chapter 15 is about that day.

"A bad day needs one"

It does. A day that went badly should end with something good in it, and I'd say that to anyone. The problem is what happens to the bad day when every day gets the same thing.

Picture the week. Monday was ordinary and got a glass. Tuesday was the worst day in a month and got a glass. Wednesday was fine and got a glass. The bad day and the ordinary day ended identically, which means the bad day got nothing extra. The thing that was supposed to be there for the hard days was already spent on the easy ones, and on the hard day it's just the routine, the same glass at the same hour, marking nothing. An earlier book in this series, *Cook the simple thing*, makes a version of this point about takeaways, and I won't repeat it. The angle I want is from the other side, from the bad day itself.

A bad day needs something that recognises it was bad. That's the need. The daily can't recognise anything, because it's the same on every day. So on the bad day you do one of two things. You have the daily, and it does nothing, because it's what you'd have had anyway, and the bad day goes unmarked. Or you have more of it, a second glass, a bigger order, three episodes, and the more is the marker, which means the marker for a hard day is now excess, and excess is what you'll reach for every time a day feels hard.

The daily can't scale. That's the whole difficulty. It's set at a level that fits an ordinary day, and an ordinary day is most days, so there's nothing left to do on the day that isn't ordinary except go

past the level. And if the daily is alcohol, going past the level on the hard days is exactly the pattern the NHS pages describe as the one to watch.

Here's the alternative, and chapter 20 fills it in. If the treat isn't daily, a bad day can have one and the treat does its job. It says this day was different, because most days don't get this. The same glass, on a Tuesday that was awful, after a week of evenings without it, is a marker. It recognises the day. The daily can't, because it's already been used on Monday.

"Taking it away would be punishing myself"

This is the belief that stops the blank day before it starts, and it's worth taking apart, because it has the logic backwards.

Ran Kivetz and Itamar Simonson, in a series of studies with about three thousand consumers, found that when a reward required more effort to earn, people shifted their preference from a useful reward to a luxury one, and their explanation is that effort reduces the guilt of choosing a luxury. The effect was stronger in people who felt guilty about luxuries, and stronger when the effort was work rather than pleasure. That's a study of loyalty schemes, and how far it carries to your kitchen I'll leave to you, but notice the structure. The treat needs to be earned because there's guilt attached to it, and the earning is the thing that pays the guilt off. Which means the treat was never simply a pleasure. It was a pleasure with a debt on it, and the daily has been settling the debt each evening with the same sentence.

Now look at what "punishing myself" assumes. It assumes the treat is the neutral state, the baseline, and not having it is a deduction. But nobody is punished by not having a glass of wine on a Tuesday. Most of the people you know don't have one on most Tuesdays, and they aren't being punished. Not having a thing is just not having it. It only feels like punishment because the daily has made the treat the default, and anything less than the default reads as a loss. The feeling is real. The punishment isn't.

The honest objection is that intention matters. If you skip the treat as a way of being hard on yourself, because you've decided you're weak or greedy or have had too many, then yes, it's punishment, and it will feel like it, and it won't last, because nobody keeps up a punishment they're giving themselves. That's why the blank day in chapter 19 is a test and not a sentence. You're not going without to prove something. You're going without to find out what the evening is like, once, and you're allowed to have the treat the next day.

There's a mirror to this belief, and I'll name it and leave it. If not having the treat is punishment, then having it is a pardon, and a pardon every evening implies an offence every day. Nothing you did today needs pardoning. That's the earning again, from underneath.

"It sets me up for tomorrow"

The idea is that the treat is fuel. The day drained you, the treat refills you, and tomorrow you start with something in the tank you'd otherwise have started without. It's an appealing model, and for a while it had scientific backing.

The backing was a theory called ego depletion, which held that self-control is a limited resource that runs down with use and needs restoring, and for about fifteen years it was one of the most cited ideas in psychology. In 2016 Martin Hagger and a large group of colleagues ran a preregistered replication of the standard experiment in 23 laboratories with just over two thousand participants. The effect they found was tiny, and the confidence interval included zero. That doesn't prove the idea is wrong in every form, and the debate went on, but the version the treat relies on, that a day of effort empties a tank that a glass of wine refills, has less behind it than it once seemed to.

Set the theory aside and look at what the treat actually does to tomorrow, because that's testable in your own house. If the daily is wine, an earlier book in this series, *The drink didn't do that*, goes through what a nightly glass does to sleep, and the short version is that it doesn't help it. If the daily is the episode or the phone in bed, *The next episode* and *The phone can wait* cover what a screen does to the hour before sleep and the hour after. If the daily is sugar, *The biscuit tin* covers the afternoon after. In every case the honest answer to "does this set me up for tomorrow" is that it sets up tonight, and tonight sets up tomorrow, and the chain doesn't run the way the belief says.

What does set you up for tomorrow is dull. Sleep. Something eaten at a reasonable hour. A stop to the working day that you can feel. None of those is a treat, and the daily can get in the way of all three, which is the point. The treat doesn't refill anything. It marks the end of the day, or it did once, and if you want tomorrow to go better the end of today needs to be an end, not a pour.

The expecting

Chapter 5 said the best bit of the day is mostly the wanting, and this chapter is about the wanting, because it's where the daily really lives.

From some point in the afternoon, the treat comes into view. Not as a decision, as a direction. The day starts to lean towards six. Things get done a little faster, or not done at all, because six is coming and six is the point. This is the expecting, and it's pleasant, and it's the part you'd actually miss. Then six comes, and the treat arrives, and the expecting stops, and the stopping feels like pleasure. That's the settling. And here's the thing to notice about it. The settling is the relief of an expectation met. It would feel like pleasure whatever was at the end of it, as long as it was what you'd been expecting.

David Neal, Wendy Wood and colleagues ran a study I find hard to forget. People who habitually ate popcorn at the cinema were given popcorn that was a week old and stale, or fresh, and watched a film. The habitual eaters ate as much of the stale as the fresh. Their hunger and how much they said they liked the popcorn made little difference. People whose cinema-popcorn habit was weaker ate according to how much they liked it. And the habit only ran in the cinema. In a meeting room, with the same popcorn, the strong-habit people ate like everyone else, by taste. The cue was the cinema. The response was eating. Liking had left the building.

That's the daily. The cue is the hour. The response is the treat. Whether you like it tonight has less to do with it than you'd think, and the proof is that you'd have the glass on a night you didn't

fancy it, because six o'clock isn't asking whether you fancy it. It's a parcel you've been waiting for all afternoon that's better as a parcel than as whatever's in it.

I'm not saying the treat is stale. I'm saying the settling would feel the same if it were. Which means most of what you'd lose by changing the daily is the expecting, the afternoon's lean, and that's the thing to be honest about. The lean is nice. It's also a lean towards a thing that isn't tasted, and it takes the afternoon with it. When the daily goes, the lean goes, and for a few days that's a loss, and then the afternoon comes back, and it turns out to have been yours all along.

What the guilt is doing

Most people with a daily have a bit of guilt about it, and most of them think of the guilt as the price. The treat is the pleasure, the guilt is what it costs, and on the whole it's worth it. I'd like to suggest the guilt is part of the pleasure, and that this is why the daily is hard to shift.

Kelly Goldsmith, Eunice Kim Cho and Ravi Dhar found that activating guilt in people made the pleasure they got from a pleasant thing greater, not smaller. Their explanation is that guilt and pleasure are associated in the mind, so that switching one on switches on thoughts of the other, and they found the effect was particular to guilt. Other negative feelings didn't do it. It's a marketing study and the pleasant things were the kind you'd expect, but the finding matches something you can check in your own kitchen. The treat that's a little bit naughty is nicer than the same thing eaten with a clear conscience. The word "naughty" is doing work on the label of every pudding in the shop for a reason.

So the guilt isn't the price. It's a flavour. And a flavour is a hard thing to give up, because you can't reason it away. If you managed to feel no guilt at all about the glass at six, my guess is that the glass would be less nice, not more, and that's a useful thing to know before you try either of the two ways out in chapter 18. Dropping the earning, which is one of the ways, means dropping the guilt the earning was there to pay for, and the treat may get a little duller. That's not a failure. That's what it tastes like on its own.

The second helping of guilt is the one at bedtime, and it works the other way. The daily leaves a small bad feeling at the end of the evening, another glass, another bar, another hour gone, and the bad feeling is uncomfortable, and tomorrow at six there's a thing that's good at making uncomfortable feelings go quiet. The guilt from last night's treat is part of what tomorrow's is for. I can't show you a study of that loop, and it's my reading. But if it's right, then the guilt is holding the daily up from both ends, and the thing to do with it isn't to feel more of it. It's to stop treating it as information about your character and start treating it as a flavour you can do without.

What the daily costs you

If you've read this far you're expecting a chapter about money or health, and there's a paragraph of each, but they're not the cost that matters. You've heard them. They haven't changed anything, which tells you they aren't where the daily lives.

The first cost is the marker. Chapter 4 said a reward marks, and the daily can't, and the consequence is that you've lost the ability to reward yourself. That sounds small until you need it. The report goes in, the difficult conversation gets had, the month ends, and there's nothing to mark it with, because the thing you'd use is what you had on Tuesday. The daily has spent your currency at the rate of one a day, and you're left with nothing to pay yourself with on the day it counts.

The second cost is the hour. The daily owns six o'clock, and the evening gets built round it. You can't easily go for a walk at six, or ring someone, or start something, because six is when the glass is, and by half past the evening has taken the shape the glass gives it, which is sitting down. Whatever the treat is, it tends to be the last active thing you do. The rest follows from it. An evening that begins with a pour tends not to begin with anything else.

The third cost is the afternoon, which chapter 12 covered. The lean towards six takes the last two hours of the day with it. The fourth is sleep, and the earlier books on each treat have that. The fifth is money, and if the daily is an order or a takeaway it's more than you'd guess, and Ask the price of the evening and Put the card away are the books, but I'm not going to put a figure on it because I'd be

inventing one. The sixth is health, and for wine chapter 6 did the count, and for sugar and screens the earlier books have it, and it's real, and it's the cost you've already discounted.

The cost I'd put first is the last one. The daily stops you looking at the day. Every evening ends the same way, so no evening asks what kind of day it was. A day that was empty ends like a day that was full. A day that was bad ends like a day that was fine. The treat is a full stop that goes at the end of every sentence regardless of what the sentence said, and after a while you stop reading the sentences. Chapter 15 is about the one sentence that most needs reading.

The day with nothing in it

Somewhere in the beliefs there's one that's true and that nobody says out loud. It's that on many days the treat is the only thing in the day that was good. Not the best thing. The only one. And if that's so, the daily isn't the problem. It's the sign of one.

Look at the day the treat is ending. Up, out, work or the children or both, back, and then the hour. In between there may have been nothing that was for you, nothing chosen, nothing you'd mention if someone asked what you did today. That isn't a failing. It's how a lot of adult days go. But it means the treat is being asked to be the whole of the good in a day, and a glass of wine can't be that, and a bar of chocolate can't, and an episode can't. They're small pleasures, sized for a day that already has something in it. Asked to be the whole thing, they're too small, which is why they get repeated, and topped up, and why the guilt comes.

The NHS has a page on five things that evidence suggests help mental wellbeing. Connect with other people. Be physically active. Learn new skills. Give to others. Pay attention to the present moment. It's the plainest list in the world and I'm not going to dress it up. But look at what's on it and what isn't. None of the five is a treat. All five are things that put something into the day rather than at the end of it. And a day with one of them in it, a walk, a call, twenty minutes at something you're learning, is a day that doesn't need the treat to be the good bit, because it already had one.

So here's my reading, and it's the centre of the book. The daily is a lid on an empty day. It goes on at six and it covers the fact that nothing happened, and it does that well enough that you don't have to notice. Take the lid off, on a blank day, and you'll see the day. That's uncomfortable, and it's the discomfort that sends people back to the daily, because seeing an empty day is worse than a flat evening. But the empty day is the thing to fix, and it can be, with something small and chosen put into it before six. Once the day has something in it, the treat can go back to being a treat, because it's no longer carrying the day.

If the day has had nothing in it for weeks, most days, and nothing feels good including the treat, that's the preface's third caution, and it's a GP. An empty fortnight isn't a habit.

What it does to the treat

Everything so far has been about what the daily does to you. This chapter is about what it does to the treat, because the treat is the thing you're trying to protect, and the daily is the worst thing that can happen to it.

Leif Nelson and Tom Meyvis ran six studies in which people had pleasant experiences, music, a massage chair, with and without breaks. The breaks made the pleasant experiences more enjoyable, because they interrupted the wearing-down that happens when a pleasure continues, and people avoided the breaks anyway, because a break in a nice thing feels like a loss. An earlier book in this series, *You didn't want it yesterday*, uses this for possessions, and I'm using it for the daily. The daily is a pleasure with no breaks in it. It's the same glass, every day, for a year, and the wearing-down has had a year to work.

Kennon Sheldon and Sonja Lyubomirsky, following 481 students for three months after a positive change, found that the good feeling from a change is eroded by two things, the fading of the positive emotion and a rise in what people then aspire to, and is slowed by two others, continued appreciation of the thing and continued variety in how it's experienced. What did you expect it to fix, earlier in this series, uses this for big life changes. For the daily, it says something simple. A treat that's appreciated and varied keeps its pleasure. A treat that's routine and identical loses it.

So the daily has been eating the treat. The glass is less nice than it was because it's been every day. The episode is less gripping because it's the fourth tonight. The order is less exciting because the app knows what you want before you do. And the way to get the treat back isn't to give it up. It's to give it breaks, which is what Quoidbach's chocolate-free week did in chapter 7, and to make it something you can notice, which is what chapter 20 is about.

This is the argument I'd most like you to take from the book, because it isn't a sacrifice. A treat that comes three times a month is better than the same treat thirty times a month, not just in total, but each time. The Friday glass after a dry week is a different drink from the Friday glass after six others. Same bottle. Different evening. The daily doesn't give you more of the treat. It gives you less of it, more often, until the pleasure is gone and only the routine and the earning are left. Taking the treat back from the daily is the most pro-pleasure thing in this book.

Chosen or arrived

Chapter 1 asked you to keep a record for a fortnight, writing a C or an A next to each treat. This chapter is about reading it. If you haven't kept it, start now and come back, because the rest of the method rests on it and guessing won't do.

The three questions. For each day's treat, ask three things, and be strict. Did I decide, before the hour, that today would have one? Could I say why, in a sentence I'd say to another adult without it sounding like an excuse? Did I notice it while I was having it? Three yeses is a C. It was chosen. Anything less is an A. It arrived. Most people who keep the record honestly find a fortnight of A's with one or two C's, and the C's are usually a Friday or a day that had something in it.

What the letters tell you. A run of A's is the daily. It means the treat is arriving on the cue of the hour, without a decision, without a reason you'd say aloud, and mostly without being tasted. That isn't a verdict on you. It's what habits look like from the inside, and Wood's diary studies in chapter 4 would predict it. What it tells you is that the earning, which you've been saying every day, wasn't a decision either. It was found after the hand moved. The C's tell you something too. They tell you what a chosen treat looks like for you, what kind of day gets one, what the reason was. Those are the days to keep.

The hard cases. Some days you'll want to write a C because the day was awful and the treat felt needed. Ask the three questions anyway. "Needed" isn't a reason you decided before the hour. It's

the earning. Some days you'll have written a C in the morning and by six not fancied it and had it anyway. That's an A wearing a C's clothes, and it's the most useful entry in the fortnight, because it shows you the hour running without you.

What to do with the record. Nothing yet. Read it, notice the ratio, and go to chapter 18. The record isn't there to shame you. It's there so that the two ways out are a choice you make with the facts in front of you, rather than a resolution made on a Sunday about a habit you haven't looked at.

The two ways out

There are two, and both work, and which you take depends on what you found in the fortnight and what you want back. Neither is giving up the treat.

Keep the treat and drop the earning. This is for the reader who looked at the record, saw a run of A's, and thought, fair enough, I like a glass at six and I'm going to have one. Fine. Have it. What changes is the earning. You don't say you've earned it, because you haven't checked and you'd say it either way. You don't say you deserve it. You say, I'm having a glass of wine, because I like one, and that's the whole reason. That sounds like nothing. It isn't. The earning was the licence, and it was carrying the guilt, and once you stop using it two things happen. The treat is a little less nice, for the reason in chapter 13, and you start to notice the days when you don't actually want it, because there's no sentence any more telling you that you do. On those days you don't have it. Over a month or two the daily thins out on its own, without a rule, because the hour was only ever running on the sentence.

Keep the earning and make the treat rare. This is for the reader who wants the treat to mean something again, and wants "I've earned it" to be true when they say it. The rule is that the earning has to pass the three questions. Decided before the hour, a reason you'd say aloud, noticed while it's happening. If it can't pass, there's no treat that day. That's stricter, and it produces more blank days, and it gets the marker back faster. Within a few weeks the treat is

happening two or three times a week, on the days that had something in them, and it's better each time, for the reasons in chapter 16.

Which one. If your record had some C's and you can see what made them, take the second way. You already know what a chosen treat looks like and you can build on it. If your record was all A's and the thought of a rule makes you want the glass now, take the first way. It's gentler and it works on the earning rather than the hour, and the hour follows. If the treat is alcohol and the count in chapter 6 came out well over, take the second way and read chapter 22 first.

Either way, the daily goes. Not the treat. The daily. The thing that comes at six whatever the day was, without a decision, with a sentence attached that was never a decision either. What's left is a treat you chose, on a day that had a reason, that you noticed while you had it. That's what a treat was before it became the habit.

The blank day

Whichever way you take, you'll have days without the treat, and the first one is the one that decides whether the rest happen. So here's how to run it, and what to expect, so it doesn't run you.

Pick the day. Not a bad day, not a Friday, not the day of something difficult. An ordinary Tuesday or Wednesday, decided the day before. The point is to see what an ordinary evening is like without the daily, and you can't see that on a day that isn't ordinary.

Fill the hour. Six o'clock will arrive and reach for the treat, and if there's nothing there but the hour, it'll be a long hour. So put something in it that isn't a substitute. Not a different drink in the same glass, not a different snack, not the phone instead of the episode. Something that uses the hour. A walk, a call to someone you've been meaning to ring, cooking something rather than ordering it, twenty minutes of a thing you're learning. Chapter 15's list is as good as any. The hour needs a new use, not a new filling.

Expect the flat evening. Chapter 7 described it. Somewhere between six and eight there'll be a stretch that feels hollow, and the words will come, "I could just have one", and they'll sound like reason. It isn't. It's the expecting with nothing to settle on. Let it be flat. It's information. This is what the hour feels like without the lid on, and it tells you how much the daily was covering. The flatness peaks and passes, usually before bed, and the next morning is ordinary.

Don't count. One blank day isn't a streak and it isn't a test of character. It's a look at the evening. If you have the treat the next day, chosen, that's fine and is the method working. If the blank day was bleak rather than flat, if it wasn't hollow but heavy and the heaviness was there before six as well, read the last paragraph of chapter 15 and the preface, because that's not what a missing treat feels like.

Then do another. The second blank day is easier than the first and the fourth is an evening. Once you've had three or four, the hour has stopped expecting, and the two ways out in chapter 18 become easy, because the treat is no longer arriving on its own. You're choosing it. That was the point.

The proper treat

The book has spent a long time on what the daily isn't. This chapter is about what a treat is, when it's working, because you're going to have them and they should be good.

Chosen ahead. A proper treat is decided before the hour, not at it. In the morning, or the day before, you know that tonight has one, and why. That sounds like it would spoil it, and it doesn't. It gives you the expecting back, honestly, as looking forward to a thing you've chosen rather than a lean towards a cue.

For a reason you'd say aloud. Not "I've earned it", which is the licence. A reason with a fact in it. The report went in. It's Friday and the week was long. It's someone's birthday. I fancy one, and I haven't had one since Sunday. That last one is allowed. Liking a thing is a reason. What isn't allowed is a reason you'd be embarrassed to say to a friend, because that's the earning in a coat.

Different from other days. The treat has to mark, which means most days can't have it. Two or three times a week is the most I'd suggest for anything, and once a week is better for the treat, because the marker gets clearer the rarer it is. If that sounds like too few, remember chapter 16. Three a month are better than thirty, each.

Noticed. This is the one that turns a routine back into a pleasure. Have the treat and nothing else. The glass without the phone. The bar sitting down, not at the counter. The episode chosen, with the next one not started. Quoidbach's chocolate was savoured because

it had been a week, and savouring is a thing you can do on purpose. If the treat isn't worth ten minutes of attention, it isn't a treat, it's a filling, and you can let it go.

Sized for the day. A treat is a small thing that ends a day that had something in it. If the day was empty, the treat can't fix that and shouldn't be asked to, and the better move is to put something into tomorrow rather than more into tonight. If the day was good, the treat rounds it off. If the day was hard, the treat recognises it, and it can, because it wasn't there yesterday.

That's a proper treat, and it's the thing this book is for. Not fewer pleasures. Pleasures that are pleasures, because they aren't the hour.

The decision

Here's the rule. Nothing daily gets called a treat.

That's it. It isn't a rule about wine, or chocolate, or television, all of which you can still have. It isn't a rule about how many. It's a rule about the word. If a thing comes every day, it's a routine, and you can keep it as a routine if you want to, without the earning. If you want to call it a treat, it has to be rare enough to be one, chosen before the hour, for a reason you'd say aloud, and noticed. Chapter 18 gave you the two ways to get there, and you've picked one.

Three when-then plans, which are a form the research on planning supports, a specific situation paired with a specific act, so the act doesn't need deciding at six.

When it's six o'clock and my hand goes to the treat, then I ask whether today was decided this morning, and if it wasn't, I do the hour's other thing, the walk or the call or the pan, and the treat can be tomorrow, chosen.

When I hear myself say "I've earned it", then I say what I actually did today in one sentence, and if the sentence is a reason, I have the treat, and if it's just a day, I don't.

When the evening goes flat, then I let it, and I notice what the flatness is like, and I don't fill it with a substitute, because the flatness is the hour learning, and it'll be shorter tomorrow.

What to expect, and this is my expectation and not a finding. The first week has three or four flat evenings and one or two treats that are better than any you've had this year. The second week has fewer flat evenings, because the hour is learning, and Phillippa Lally and colleagues, in a study of everyday habits, found that a daily behaviour in a fixed setting became automatic over weeks, and I'd expect the unlearning to run on something like the same clock. Somewhere in the second month the hour stops reaching. Six o'clock is just six o'clock, and on the evenings that have a treat, you'll know why, and you'll taste it. And the earning will have gone quiet, not because you stopped it, but because it had nothing to license.

Wine, the vape, the order, the bar and the phone

Every treat has its own book in this series, and this one has stayed on the logic that runs across them. But the logic lands differently depending on what the treat is, and some of the differences matter for safety. So, each in turn.

Wine, or whatever the glass is. This is the one to be careful with. Chapter 6 did the count, and if yours came out well over fourteen units a week, the NHS advice is to cut down, spread what you drink over three or more days, and have drink-free days. That's the blank day, and it's the right method. But there's a line the NHS draws that this book has to draw too. If you've become physically dependent, meaning that a day without makes you anxious, or you've noticed sweating, shaking or nausea in the morning, then the NHS says stopping overnight could be harmful and you should get advice from a GP about how to cut down and whether you need medicine to do it safely. That advice comes before any blank day. The NHS page on alcohol support names a free national helpline, Drinkline, and local alcohol services, and a GP is the place to start. The drink didn't do that, earlier in this series, is the book for the nightly glass once you're safe to change it.

The cigarette or the vape. The treat logic applies, and the earning is the same sentence. But nicotine adds a mechanism this book hasn't covered, which is that the relief of having one is largely the relief of a need the last one created, and that changes the method. The cigarette does nothing and The vape in your pocket are the

books, and I'd read them before applying the blank day to nicotine, because a blank day with nicotine is withdrawal and needs its own handling.

The bar, the biscuit, the fridge. If the treat is food, The biscuit tin covers sugar as a reward and Eat when you're hungry covers eating for a feeling, and You were full ten minutes ago covers not stopping. The proper treat in chapter 20 is what all three would call pudding, chosen and sat down for. And the preface's caution stands. If eating feels out of control, or you undo it afterwards, that's the NHS eating disorders page and Beat, not a method.

The order, the parcel, the takeaway. You didn't want it yesterday is about buying for the lift, Put the card away is about what it does to the balance, and Cook the simple thing is about the takeaway that became Thursday. The daily here is the easiest to see on a bank statement and the easiest to blank, because the hour can be filled with the pan.

The episode and the phone. The next episode and The phone can wait cover the screen versions, and the blank day for these is the one that surprises people most, because the flat evening turns out to be about forty minutes long and then there's a whole evening in it.

Mine is different. It isn't, in the part that matters. It arrives at an hour, it comes with a sentence, and it can't tell a good day from a bad one. That's the daily, whatever's in the glass.

The only hour alone, shift work, the bag from the shop, the children, and the treat that's harmless

The method assumes an ordinary day with an evening in it and a reader who can decide what happens at six. Not everyone has that. Each of these changes something, and I'll take them in turn.

The only hour alone. For some readers the treat is the only time in the day that's theirs, the glass after the children are down, the bar at the counter in the quiet. Taking it away looks like taking away the hour. Don't. Keep the hour. The hour is the thing you need, and the treat has been standing in for it. Sit in the quiet with the glass and you've got the hour and a glass. Sit in the quiet without it and you've still got the hour, and my guess is that after a few evenings the quiet turns out to have been the treat all along. The blank day here is about finding out which part you were protecting.

Shift work. Six o'clock may be your morning, or the middle of your sleep. The hour is whatever hour follows work, and the method is the same with the clock moved. The one thing to add is that the treat after a night shift is often doing the job of a signal that it's time to sleep, and if it's alcohol it does that job badly. The lie-in costs more than it gives, earlier in this series, covers what a shifted sleep needs, and a treat isn't on the list.

The bag from the shop. Your partner comes in with the bottle, or the bar, or says "shall we order", and the treat arrives whether you chose it or not. This is a conversation, and a short one. You're not asking them to stop. You're asking them not to bring yours on the days you've decided are blank, and to have theirs if they want it.

Most partners will, and some will join in, and the ones who push back are worth listening to, because "you're no fun" is sometimes the earning coming from the next chair.

The children. If the treat is shared with the children, the ice cream after tea, the film, then it's theirs as well as yours, and rationing it for your reasons is unfair on them. The move is to separate the two. The children's thing stays as it is, and yours, the glass beside it, is what the method is about. There's a second point, which is that a daily treat in front of children teaches them the earning, and Let them do it badly and They're nine, not lazy touch on what children learn from what they watch. A treat that's rare and chosen teaches something better.

The treat that's genuinely harmless. A square of chocolate. A cup of good coffee at four. Ten minutes of a game. Cheap, small, no cost you can find. Fine. Keep it, and the first way out in chapter 18 is the one, keep the treat and drop the earning. The book's argument isn't that a harmless treat is harmful. It's that calling it a reward every day has spent the word, and if you'd like the word back for the days that need it, the harmless treat needs to be a routine and not a prize. If you don't need the word back, you've nothing to change.

The bigger habit you dropped. Some readers stopped smoking, or drinking, or something else, and the daily is what took its place, and they're fairly sure that's a good trade. It probably was. The question is whether the trade is finished, or whether the new daily is doing the old one's job of covering the hour. If it's the second, the hour is still uncovered, and the method here is gentle enough to try without putting the old habit at risk. If it isn't, and the thought

of blanking the new daily brings the old one back into view, leave the new daily alone and read the earlier book for the old one instead.

When you tried and it was bleak. If you've had blank days before and they weren't flat but heavy, and the heaviness was there before six and after it and on the days with the treat too, and it's been like that for a fortnight or more, the NHS describes that as the pattern to take to a GP. The treat isn't the cause, and blank days won't help, and the book's method should wait until you've had that conversation.

When the glass was in your hand at six

It'll happen. A Tuesday, an ordinary one, and six o'clock came and the glass was in your hand before the question got asked, and you had it, and you had another, and now it's Wednesday and the thought in your head is that you're back where you started.

You aren't. Look at what happened. The hour reached, and you were somewhere else, and the hand did what it had done a thousand times. Lally's study found that a missed day didn't do much to a habit being formed, and I'd extend that to a missed evening for a habit being unlearned, which is the same thing from the other side. One evening on the daily is one evening. The hour hasn't relearned anything from one evening. It's the run of them that trains it, and a run is what you've stopped.

Then ask which belief it was. Not whether you're weak, which is the earning in a different coat, but which of the chapters was running. Was it a bad day, and chapter 9's belief that a bad day needs one? Was it that the day had nothing in it, and chapter 15's empty day, in which case the fix is tomorrow's afternoon and not tonight's glass? Was it the bag from the shop? Was it just the hour, running without you, and the answer is that you hadn't decided in the morning and so there was nothing to decide with at six? Each of those points to a different move tomorrow, and none of them is a resolution.

What not to do. Don't count. The blank days you'd had aren't cancelled by one that wasn't, and a tally of days without the treat turns the whole thing into a streak, and a streak is a thing you

break, and breaking it is the thought that sends people back. Don't punish, which chapter 10 covered, by making tomorrow a blank day as penance. Tomorrow is whatever you decide in the morning, and if you decide on a treat, chosen, for a reason, that's the method, not a lapse. And don't drop the earning's replacement. If you'd been saying "I'm having a glass because I like one", keep saying it, including tonight, in the past tense. I had two glasses because the hour reached and I let it. That's a sentence with a fact in it, and the facts are what the method runs on.

If the evening on the daily becomes a week on the daily, that's not a lapse either. It's the habit back, and you go to chapter 17 and start the record again, because the record is where it stopped being a habit the first time.

Six o'clock, Thursday

It's ten to six on a Tuesday, a few weeks on. You're in. There's a moment, a small one, when your hand knows where the cupboard is, and then the moment passes, because this morning you didn't decide on a treat and so there isn't one, and that's all. You put the pan on, or you put your shoes on, or you ring your sister, and the evening starts without a pour in it. Around seven there's a flat ten minutes, shorter than last week's. It goes. The evening is an evening.

Thursday is different. Thursday you decided on Wednesday night, because Thursday is the day the thing you've been dreading at work gets done, one way or the other, and whatever happens it'll be over. At six on Thursday you pour the glass, and you sit down with it, and the phone is in the other room, and you drink it. It's cold and it's good and you taste all of it, because it's the first since Sunday and because it's Thursday's glass, not the hour's. You say what it's for, out loud, or near enough. That's done. And the glass agrees.

Then Friday comes, and it's a Friday, and you'll decide in the morning.

That's the whole thing. Not a life without treats, and not a rule about wine or chocolate or the rest. A day that was ordinary and ended as an ordinary day, and a day that was something and ended with something, and a sentence that was true when you said it.

One action. Tonight, whatever the hour brings, ask whether you decided this morning. If you didn't, do the hour's other thing, and let tomorrow morning decide tomorrow. That's the daily, gone. The treat is still there, on Thursday, and it'll be better than it's been in a year.

Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't medical advice. If your treat is alcohol and it's daily, or your eating feels out of control, or the day has felt empty for weeks, the preface says where to go and a GP is the person to ask. The examples throughout, the glass at six, the bar at the counter, the order on the bad Tuesday, the vape on the step, the phone in bed and the partner with the bag from the shop, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026 by reading their published abstracts. None was read in full, and none carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a study is a review or a model, I've said so, and where the work was done with animals, I've said that too.

Chapter 1. No sources. The terms are the book's own.

Chapter 3. Taylor, Webb and Sheeran, "I deserve a treat!": justifications for indulgence undermine the translation of intentions into action", *British Journal of Social Psychology* 53, 2014, pages 501 to 520, as used in *The biscuit tin*. Kivetz and Zheng, "Determinants of justification and self-control", *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 135, 2006, pages 572 to 587. Khan and Dhar, "Licensing effect in consumer choice", *Journal of Marketing Research* 43, 2006, pages 259 to 266. Five studies. Blanken, van de Ven and Zeelenberg, "A meta-analytic review of moral licensing", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 41,

2015, pages 540 to 558. 91 studies, 7,397 participants, an effect size of 0.31. The claim that the earning arrives after the decision and can't tell days apart is mine.

Chapter 4. Wood and R nger, "Psychology of habit", Annual Review of Psychology 67, 2016, pages 289 to 314. A review. Wood, Quinn and Kashy, "Habits in everyday life: thought, emotion, and action", Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83, 2002, pages 1281 to 1297. Two diary studies with hourly reports. The claim that a reward marks and the daily can't is mine, and so is the bell.

Chapter 5. Galak and Redden, "The properties and antecedents of hedonic decline", Annual Review of Psychology 69, 2018, pages 1 to 25. A review. Berridge, Robinson and Aldridge, "Dissecting components of reward: 'liking', 'wanting', and learning", Current Opinion in Pharmacology 9, 2009, pages 65 to 73. A review of largely animal work, and the chapter says so. That the best bit is mostly the wanting is my reading.

Chapter 6. The NHS page on alcohol units, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026, for the definition of a unit, the formula, the fourteen-unit guidance, spreading over three or more days and drink-free days. The 2.3-unit figure for a 175-millilitre glass at thirteen per cent is my arithmetic using the NHS formula, and the sixteen a week follows from it. The rest of the chapter is my reasoning.

Chapter 7. Quoidbach and Dunn, "Give it up: a strategy for combating hedonic adaptation", Social Psychological and Personality Science 4, 2013, pages 563 to 568. The abstract doesn't

give the number of participants. That the flat evening is the expecting unmet, and that it fades, is my extension of a one-week study.

Chapter 8. Adam and Epel, "Stress, eating and the reward system", Physiology and Behavior 91, 2007, pages 449 to 458. A review proposing a model, drawing on animal and human research, and the abstract says the human mechanisms are only starting to be understood. The earlier book referred to is The feeling will pass without help. The lid is mine.

Chapter 9. No research sources. The earlier book referred to is Cook the simple thing. The argument that the daily can't scale is mine.

Chapter 10. Kivetz and Simonson, "Earning the right to indulge: effort as a determinant of customer preferences toward frequency program rewards", Journal of Marketing Research 39, 2002, pages 155 to 170. About 3,100 consumers, studies of loyalty schemes. The reading of "punishment" is mine.

Chapter 11. Hagger and colleagues, "A multilab preregistered replication of the ego-depletion effect", Perspectives on Psychological Science 11, 2016, pages 546 to 573. 23 laboratories, 2,141 participants, an effect size of 0.04 with a confidence interval including zero. The earlier books referred to are The drink didn't do that, The next episode, The phone can wait and The biscuit tin, and the claims about sleep are theirs, not restated here.

Chapter 12. Neal, Wood, Wu and Kurlander, "The pull of the past: when do habits persist despite conflict with motives?", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37, 2011, pages 1428 to 1437. Two field experiments. The parcel is mine, and so is the application to six o'clock.

Chapter 13. Goldsmith, Cho and Dhar, "When guilt begets pleasure: the positive effect of a negative emotion", *Journal of Marketing Research* 49, 2012, pages 872 to 881. That the guilt is a flavour, and the bedtime loop, are my readings.

Chapter 14. No research sources. The earlier books referred to are Ask the price of the evening and Put the card away. No figure for money is given because none was verified.

Chapter 15. The NHS page on five steps to mental wellbeing, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The lid is my reading. The depression pointer is to the NHS page on symptoms of depression in adults, read the same day.

Chapter 16. Nelson and Meyvis, "Interrupted consumption: disrupting adaptation to hedonic experiences", *Journal of Marketing Research* 45, 2008, pages 654 to 664, as used in You didn't want it yesterday. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, "The challenge of staying happier: testing the Hedonic Adaptation Prevention model", *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 38, 2012, pages 670 to 680, as used in What did you expect it to fix. 481 students over three months. That three a month are better than thirty, each, is my claim and not theirs.

Chapters 17 to 20. No research sources. The three questions, the two ways out, the blank day and the proper treat are my suggestions and haven't been tested as a method.

Chapter 21. Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", *European Journal of Social Psychology* 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested and what I say to expect is my expectation, including the guess that unlearning runs on a similar clock to learning, which Lally didn't study.

Chapter 22. The NHS pages on alcohol units and on alcohol support, at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026, for the guidance and for the warning about stopping overnight when physically dependent. The helpline number isn't printed because numbers and hours change. The NHS eating disorders overview, read the same day, names Beat. The earlier books are named in the text. No claim is made about the effectiveness of any service.

Chapter 23. The NHS page on symptoms of depression in adults, read on 26 September 2026. The earlier books referred to are *The lie-in costs more than it gives*, *Let them do it badly* and *They're nine, not lazy*. Everything else in the chapter is my suggestion.

Chapter 24. Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a missed evening, and from forming a habit to unlearning one, is mine.

Looked up and not used. Redden's 2008 paper on categorisation and satiation in the Journal of Consumer Research had no abstract available to me and isn't cited. Ramanathan and Williams's 2007 paper on the emotional consequences of indulgence couldn't be retrieved and isn't cited. Mochon, Norton and Ariely's 2008 paper on frequent small boosts to happiness wasn't looked up. Wood and Neal's 2007 theoretical paper on habits wasn't found in the database searched, and the 2016 review covers the same ground.