

Week 01 - Build the Menu

Week 02 - Read Your Hunger

Week 03 - Sequence the Meal

Week 04 - Become the Chef

SERIES 02 · DOPAMINE MENU ARCHITECT

WEEK 01

# BUILD THE MENU

*Or: How to feed your brain on purpose instead of letting it raid the pantry at midnight.*

You are under-stimulated. The screen isn't doing it. The ceiling isn't doing it. Sitting still feels like trying to hold water in your hands — the attention just runs out. **This is not a character flaw. This is an ADHD brain running low on dopamine and looking for any source it can find.**

The problem isn't that you seek stimulation. The problem is

that without a plan, your brain defaults to whatever's fastest and easiest — and the fastest and easiest options are rarely the ones that actually help. This week you build something better: a personal menu of brain-feeding activities organized by how much time you have and what your nervous system actually needs.

## WHY "MENU" AND NOT "LIST"

A list implies everything is equivalent. A menu implies **intentional choice based on current appetite**. You don't order an entrée when you need a snack, and you don't reach for a side dish when you're genuinely hungry. The same logic applies to your nervous system.

Dopamine isn't just the "pleasure chemical" — it's the brain's **anticipation and motivation signal**. The ADHD brain produces and processes it differently, which means you need more varied, more deliberate inputs to stay regulated. A menu gives your brain a curated set of options instead of an open-foraging catastrophe.

DOPAMINE

THE THREE COURSES — WHAT THEY ARE AND WHY THEY WORK



### APPETIZERS

Quick movement · physical reset

5 MIN

Movement is the fastest legal way to shift your neurochemistry. Five minutes of physical activity raises dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin simultaneously — the exact trio the ADHD brain runs short on. An Appetizer isn't exercise. *It's a neurological starter course.*

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50 jumping jacks, as fast as comfortable

Gets blood to the prefrontal cortex in under 90 seconds



Walk outside to the end of the block and back

Light and movement together — a powerful reset combo



Two songs. Dance alone. No audience required.

Rhythm plus movement plus music hits three dopamine pathways at once



10 slow pushups, 10 slow squats, repeat once

Resistance movement with a tempo cue anchors a scattered mind



5-minute stretch — slow, floor-based, no goal

Parasympathetic activation: downregulates anxious under-stimulation



## ENTRÉES

Deep work · sustained engagement

20 MIN

Deep work items on the menu are not chores. They are activities that require enough cognitive engagement to produce a genuine sense of progress — which is one of the most reliable dopamine sources a brain can have. *Completion is its own reward, neurochemically speaking.* The key: the task must be slightly challenging but clearly achievable in 20 minutes.

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Write freely on any topic — no editing, no backspace

Sustained output with no external judgment is deeply regulating



Read a physical book — phone in another room

20 uninterrupted minutes of reading is a genuine cognitive workout



Work a puzzle, crossword, or logic problem

Low-stakes challenge with clear feedback loops — the ADHD brain's sweet spot



Tackle one specific, completable task from your to-do list

The word "completable" is load-bearing — pick something finishable in 20 min



Listen to one long-form podcast or lecture on something genuinely interesting

Passive-but-engaged — useful when the brain wants input, not output



## SIDES

Creative play · low-pressure novelty

10 MIN

Sides exist for one reason: novelty. The ADHD brain is unusually responsive to new stimuli, and creative play delivers novelty without the pressure of performance or completion. *A Side doesn't need to produce anything. It just needs to be genuinely enjoyable and slightly different from whatever you were doing before.*

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Play an instrument — anything, without practicing

Play, not practice. The distinction matters enormously for your brain.



Sketch or doodle — no subject required

Hand-to-eye coordination plus open-ended output is quietly absorbing



Make something small in the kitchen — a snack, a drink, anything with steps

Multi-sensory, sequential, and produces something tangible in under 10 min



Take 10 photos of things around you — notice light, texture, composition

Shifts perceptual attention outward; interrupts rumination effectively



Look something up you've always been vaguely curious about — one tab, then close

Satisfies novelty-seeking with a defined endpoint so it doesn't spiral

## Now build yours — three items per course, from your own life

The examples above are starting points. The menu only works if the items on it are things *you* actually want to do. Below are blank lines for your three personal additions to each course. Bring these to session — your choices will tell us both something useful.

 APPETIZERS

1.

 ENTRÉES

1.

 SIDES

1.

----- 2. -----	----- 2. -----	----- 2. -----
3. -----	3. -----	3. -----

USING THE MENU THIS WEEK

1

THE TRIGGER MOMENT

**Notice when you are under-stimulated.  
Name it out loud.**

The moment you catch yourself doom-scrolling, staring at the ceiling, or channel-surfing without actually watching — that's the trigger. Say the words: *"I'm under-stimulated right now."* Naming the state is the first act of regulation. It moves you from passive drift to active awareness.

👉 Phone face-down. Both feet flat on the floor. Say the words.

🕒 10 seconds

2

THE TIME CHECK

**Ask: how much time do I actually have right now?**

Five minutes available → Appetizer. Ten minutes → Side. Twenty minutes or more → Entrée. This is the

only decision the menu asks you to make in the moment. **How much time you have determines the course. Everything else is already chosen.**

👉 Glance at the clock. One number. That's all you need.

🕒 5 seconds

### 3

#### THE ORDER

**Pick the first item on that course that sounds genuinely appealing. Start it.**

Not the best item. Not the most productive item. The one that sounds appealing right now. The menu exists to give your brain real options — so trust the one that pulls at you slightly. *Appetite is information. Your brain is telling you what it needs.*

👉 One finger on the item. Say the name of it. Begin.

🕒 immediate

### 4

#### THE CHECK

**After the item: rate how you feel on a scale of 1–5. One number.**

Not a journal entry. One number: 1 means it didn't help, 5 means noticeably better. Over the course of the week, these numbers will tell you which menu items are genuinely feeding your brain and which ones are just

filling time. **Items that consistently score 1 or 2 get**

## replaced next week.

👉 Phone in hand, notes app open, type: date · course · item · number. Close.

 60 seconds



*The ADHD brain isn't broken — it's a high-appetite organ living in a low-stimulus world. Doomscrolling isn't weakness; it's your brain doing the only thing it knows how to do when it's hungry and the cupboard looks empty. This week you stock the cupboard. That changes everything that comes after it.*

— Brian Jaeger, MA, CRC, LMHC



### **This week's reflection (bring it to session)**

Which course did you reach for most — Appetizer, Entrée, or Side? And which item scored highest on your 1–5 scale? Both of those answers tell us something important about how your brain is wired right now.



### **The week's target, simply stated**

Use the menu at least once a day when you notice understimulation. Log the course, the item, and one number afterward. Fill in your three personal additions to each course.

That's the whole assignment.

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Private client resource – please do not share