

Your Dopamine Menu: Break Smarter, Not Harder

Why You Need This

Your brain craves dopamine — the "reward" chemical that makes activities feel good. Scrolling social media is designed to deliver instant, effortless dopamine hits, which is why it hijacks your breaks without you realising.

The problem: Scrolling feels easy in the moment, but often leaves you feeling drained, guilty, or more tired than before.

The solution: A dopamine menu gives you pre-planned, genuinely satisfying break options that are *just as easy* as reaching for your phone — but leave you recharged, not depleted.

How It Works

- **Choice = control:** When you design your breaks, you reclaim autonomy (one of the three core motivation needs).
- **Reduces decision fatigue:** No more "what should I do now?" spirals—you've already decided.
- **Competes with defaults:** Scrolling wins because it's frictionless. Your menu makes better options equally easy.

Build Your Menu: Reflection Questions

Use these prompts to identify activities that truly recharge you (not what you think you "should" do).

1. What actually recharges you?

Think honestly: What leaves you feeling lighter, clearer, or more energised—not guilty or more tired?

2. What can you do in 5 minutes that feels like a win?

Tiny actions that reset your brain fast: stretch, make tea, pet your cat, listen to one song, stare out the window, doodle.

3. What needs 15–30 minutes but genuinely resets your brain?

Longer breaks that restore focus: walk outside, cook a snack, call a friend, take a nap, play a game level, do a craft, journal.

4. What do you wish you did more often?

This reveals intrinsic joys you've buried: reading for pleasure, sketching, gardening, playing guitar, baking.

5. What's your "emergency escape" when overwhelmed?

Be honest—sometimes it IS scrolling. Can you make it intentional? (E.g., scroll memes with a 10-minute timer vs. infinite feed.)

6. What do you NOT want on your menu?

Name the traps: activities that drain you, trigger guilt, or spiral into procrastination. Self-awareness = power.

7. (Optional) What micro-task gives you life-admin dopamine?

For busy/mature-age students: Pay one bill, book an appointment, tidy one drawer—productivity hit without study fatigue.

Example Menu (for inspiration—yours should reflect YOUR joys!)

Break Length	Activity Options
5 min	Stretch at desk, make herbal tea, listen to one favourite song, step outside for fresh air
15 min	Walk around the block, call a friend, play with pet, do a quick yoga video, tidy one surface
30+ min	Cook a proper meal, take a nap, read a chapter for fun, practice an instrument, do a hobby project
SOS (overwhelmed)	Timed social media scroll (10 min with alarm), box breathing (4-4-4-4), vent to study buddy, watch one funny video, guided meditation, sprint exercise to de-stress the body

Make It Work: Implementation Tips

1. **Remove friction:** Keep break items ready — headphones by desk, tea bags visible, walking shoes by door.
2. **Use if-then plans:** "If I finish a study block, then I pick from my 5-min menu BEFORE touching my phone."
3. **Set timers for "risky" breaks:** Scrolling or gaming? Set a loud alarm so 15 minutes doesn't become 90.
4. **Update your menu:** What feels good changes — review monthly and swap stale options for new ones.
5. **Share with a buddy:** Text a friend your menu; accountability makes it real.

The Big Picture

You can't rely on motivation or willpower to "just take better breaks."

But you CAN design a system that makes good breaks as easy as bad ones.

Your menu = your autonomy. Use it.

Need help customising this for breaks, energy management, or study-life balance?

Book a session with Learning Skills Advisor — we're here to help you design what works for YOUR life.

Book here: [Learning Skills Advice | CUC Mt Isa](#)

Email: dergees@cucmountisa.edu.au

