

MAX PARADOX

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Self-Help with a Sense of Humor ;)

Every Day I Have to Figure Out What to Eat

How to Stop Losing Your Life to “What’s for Dinner?”



We have a problem. Relax. We can solve it—and have a laugh along the way.

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INTRO

It is 6:17 p.m. You are standing in front of the refrigerator with the door open, staring at its contents as if they have been legally required to develop new ideas since yesterday. They have not. There is half a cucumber, three eggs, a container you no longer trust, mustard in four emotional stages, and a jar of something purchased during a brief period when you believed you were going to become the kind of person who cooks with capers.

You close the refrigerator.

Then, because apparently twelve seconds may have changed the situation, you open it again.

Still no dinner.

This is how one of the most repetitive problems in adult life begins: not hunger, exactly, but the question attached to it. What are we eating? What should I cook? Do I need groceries? Is there anything quick? Is ordering takeout irresponsible? Did we already have pasta twice this week? Does toast count as dinner if you put something green next to it?

Nobody warned us how much administrative work would be involved in remaining fed.

As a child, food often appeared through systems you did not manage. Someone bought it, planned it, cooked it, or at least announced that dinner would happen at a particular time. Then adulthood arrived and handed you a refrigerator, a grocery store with 38,000 products, several delivery apps, nutritional advice from fourteen mutually hostile internet tribes, and the permanent responsibility of deciding what goes into your mouth three times a day.

Congratulations on your independence.

Please select a protein.

The exhausting part is not usually cooking itself. Sometimes cooking is annoying, certainly, especially when a recipe describes itself as “easy” and then asks you to finely chop twelve things, toast spices, zest a lemon, make a reduction, and locate fresh tarragon as if you live above a Parisian market. But for many people, the real drain happens before the pan even reaches the stove. It is the endless sequence of tiny decisions: what to eat, what ingredients are missing, whether you feel like cooking, what everyone else wants, how healthy it should be, how much effort you can tolerate, and whether the chicken in the fridge is still chicken or has entered the next stage of its career.

You are not making one food decision.

You are running a small restaurant with one exhausted employee and extremely inconsistent customers.

The customers are also you.

Monday You wants to eat healthier. Tuesday You wants something comforting. Wednesday You forgot to thaw anything. Thursday You is suddenly convinced that all existing meals are boring. Friday You deserves a treat because surviving Thursday was apparently an achievement worthy of catering. By Sunday, you are eating a strange collection of leftovers because throwing them away feels wrong and planning another meal feels worse.

Then Monday returns with the confidence of someone who remembers nothing.

This cycle creates a peculiar kind of mental fatigue because the problem never stays solved. You can successfully answer “What’s for dinner?” tonight, and the universe responds with an encouraging message:

Excellent.

See you tomorrow.

That is what makes food planning different from many other tasks. You can renew your passport and, with luck, stop thinking about it for years. You can buy a vacuum cleaner and consider the matter closed until it begins making the sound of a helicopter swallowing a fork. But eating is relentless. You finish breakfast and lunch is already somewhere backstage stretching.

The goal of this book is not to turn you into a meal-prepping machine who spends Sunday afternoon filling thirty-seven identical containers while smiling calmly beside an industrial quantity of broccoli. If you enjoy that, wonderful. I respect your containers. Please do not make me label them.

The goal is simpler: to make feeding yourself take less thought.

That distinction matters. People often try to solve food fatigue by becoming dramatically better at food. They download complicated meal-planning apps. They save 126 recipes. They subscribe to cooking channels. They create folders called QUICK DINNERS, HEALTHY DINNERS, REALLY QUICK DINNERS, and THINGS I WILL DEFINITELY COOK, which gradually become museums of meals nobody has ever seen in person.

Information is rarely the main problem.

You already know that chicken exists.

You know rice exists.

You may even possess both simultaneously.

And yet there you are at 6:17 p.m., looking into the refrigerator like a detective investigating a disappearance.

The problem is usually that your food system asks you to make too many decisions too often. Every meal begins from zero. You keep treating dinner as a new creative project instead of a recurring household function. You ask yourself what you “feel like” eating at precisely the moment when you are tired, hungry, busy, and therefore psychologically qualified to answer only one question:

“Can someone bring me food immediately?”

This is not a character flaw. It is bad timing combined with unnecessary complexity.

Hunger is a terrible executive chef.

When you are hungry, the part of your brain responsible for thoughtful planning is competing against a much older department whose strategic vision is roughly: calories now. This is why a person can spend twenty minutes considering balanced meals and then suddenly be standing in the kitchen eating shredded cheese directly from the package.

The meeting has been adjourned.

Over the course of this book, we are going to reduce the number of food decisions you have to make without reducing your life to seven joyless meals repeated until morale collapses. You will build a simple system for deciding what to eat, keeping useful food available, creating reliable default meals, shopping with less nonsense, handling other people’s preferences, surviving busy days, dealing with boredom, using takeout without turning it into either a moral crisis or a financial subscription, and recovering when the entire system falls apart because life occasionally has opinions.

Most importantly, you will stop demanding that every meal be an inspired performance.

Some meals can simply work.

A Tuesday dinner does not need a concept.

It does not need to express your values, maximize fourteen nutrients, use the basil before it dies, satisfy every person in the household equally, photograph well, cost almost nothing, create no dishes, take twelve minutes, and make you feel like someone who has their life together.

Sometimes dinner's job is to be dinner.

That sounds obvious until you notice how many ridiculous expectations have attached themselves to food. Meals are supposed to be healthy, exciting, affordable, varied, homemade, quick, environmentally responsible, family-approved, culturally interesting, nutritionally optimized, and preferably produced from ingredients already in the house.

At some point, a bowl of pasta needs legal representation.

We are going to remove that pressure by replacing constant improvisation with useful defaults. Not rigid rules. Not a military food calendar. Defaults. Decisions made once that can be reused until they stop being useful. A short list of meals you genuinely eat. A grocery structure that supports those meals. Backup food for the days when your energy level is approximately potato. Simple methods for choosing among options without opening five apps and conducting a household referendum.

You will still decide what to eat.

You just will not need to reinvent civilization before every dinner.

And if the system works properly, something surprisingly pleasant happens: food becomes food again. You can enjoy cooking when you want to cook. You can try something new when you actually have the energy for novelty. You can order pizza because you chose pizza, not because you reached

8:42 p.m. after ninety minutes of indecision and finally surrendered to melted cheese.

There is an enormous difference between choosing convenience and being defeated by dinner.

By the end of this book, you should have a food routine flexible enough for real life and simple enough to survive contact with Tuesday. You will know what to do when you are tired, when nobody agrees, when the fridge is empty, when the plan fails, when you are bored with your usual meals, and when you simply do not want to cook.

No culinary reinvention required.

No twelve-week transformation.

No mandatory quinoa.

We have one recurring problem to solve:

You have to eat every day.

It would be nice if deciding how did not become your second job.

Chapter 1 - Dinner Is Not a Daily Creativity Contest

At 5:43 p.m., you receive the question.

"What do you want for dinner?"

It sounds harmless. Almost friendly. A normal sentence exchanged by civilized adults.

Unfortunately, your brain hears:

"Please review every meal available to humanity and select the optimal one based on health, cost, time, ingredients, current cravings, previous meals this week, everyone else's preferences, and whether we still have that spinach."

You say, "I don't know."

The other person says, "Me neither."

Excellent.

The Department of Dinner has opened another productive session.

This is one of the biggest reasons food becomes mentally exhausting: we approach a routine problem as if it requires a fresh idea every time. Dinner happens almost every day, yet many households treat it like a surprise event.

"Oh no. Evening again."

We would never run most of life this way. You do not wake up each morning and conduct extensive research into which toothpaste best represents your current emotional state. You probably use the same one until it runs out. You do not stand beside the washing machine considering whether tonight is finally the night to explore an exciting new philosophy of laundry.

Routine tasks survive because we automate enough of them.

Food often does not.

Instead, we preserve an odd expectation that meals should be varied enough to remain interesting, healthy enough to feel responsible, convenient enough to fit the schedule, inexpensive enough to avoid guilt, and appealing enough that nobody sighs when you announce them.

This makes dinner unnecessarily ambitious.

The first change is simple: stop requiring every meal to be a new decision.

You do not need infinite variety. You need a reliable collection of acceptable options.

That word matters: acceptable.

Not spectacular. Not restaurant-level. Not “everyone clapped when I brought it to the table.”

Acceptable means you like it, you can make it, the ingredients are reasonably easy to keep around, and eating it does not create a domestic crisis.

Most people already have several meals that fit this description. They simply do not treat them as a system.

Maybe yours include tacos, pasta with tomato sauce, grilled chicken and rice, scrambled eggs with toast, a stir-fry, quesadillas, soup, baked potatoes, sandwiches, burgers, a grain bowl, or frozen dumplings with vegetables. The specific meals do not matter. What matters is that they work repeatedly.

These are your default meals.