



# PREFACE

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We all have a little addiction, or several, nowadays.

And it's no wonder. These days, we have some of the brightest minds trying to make things that are already sticky, even *more* sticky, whether it's a cake or an app.

This means modern life is addictive. Outrageously so. All of the things that were already inherently addictive – sugar, sex, booze, news and buying shoes – also just so happen to generate titanic profits, and thus we have gangs of geniuses who have graduated from Oxford or Harvard (and who will mention so at least once an hour) working on making them *even more addictive*.

It's a fix.

These unfairly gifted humans taste-engineer, finely market, bait clicks, engagement-farm, loop rewards, reduce friction, hide the exits and write irresistible cliffhangers. This reduces those of us who were already pretty helpless in the face of temptation into the bewildered – who wind up a bit too drunk on a Wednesday, with two broken vapes in our bag, wearing an outfit we can't afford, wondering why our screen time reached four hours today, and why the paperback we *really* wanted to read sits ignored in our bag while we obsess over Instagram on the commute.

We've lost control, ever so slightly. Thing uses person, rather than person using thing.

Once we like something – Vinted, roulette, the emotionally unavailable – we want to do it again and again. We are pleasure-seekers, eternal optimists who believe that buying this goose-down duvet could actually change our life, that this meme-making app could catapult us into influencer stardom, or that this CBD oil will stop our anxiety from predicting five-car pile-ups the next time we're driving on a motorway.

I can't think of one friend or family member who isn't addicted to *something*, whether it's getting into credit card debt to obtain the latest tech, gossiping about others (judgement is addictive), *Words with Friends* or get-rich-quick YouTube clickbait (my partner George. Spoiler: we're still not rich).

Truly, most of us struggle with a few things/many things. We are the people who accept Amazon packages we don't quite recall buying (every day

is Christmas for Cath', my ex-flatmate said), who will purchase wine over vegetables on the day before payday, who would take giant Toblerones rather than kindling to a desert island.

Against the backdrop of geniuses hacking into our primal urges, we also have the modern wellness explosion. In many ways, we're watching what we put in our bodies and minds more than ever.

This means that we haul ourselves into the dock after the act. Why can't you just eat one M&M? Why do you keep texting that toxic fuc . . . funhuman? Why are you still on socials at 11pm . . . wait, do you have iPhone claw?

When it all goes sideways, the modern product-makers' caveat is 'but we told you to drink/eat/bet/shop/scroll/use our app responsibly! Please see it in this teeny tiny font on the underside/in the Ts and Cs of our product, whereby we shunt all of the responsibility of its highly addictive design back on to your human weakness. Oh and we donate money to organisations that help cretins like you, so. OK, thanksbye.'

Our little addictions may not be *all* our fault, but they are – inconveniently – all our responsibility. Modern life is not about to get less addictive any time soon; the geniuses at work in laboratories are not going to down tools. If anything, it will grow more sticky. We are the only hope we've got, and we need to get back on our own sides, as the mug slogans might say.

Little addictions don't require long-term abstinence. You're not going to buy a dedicated book on how to quit [insert thing] because, frankly, you don't need to quit it, nor do you want to. Instead though, you might want to shrink or temper your use of this thing before it grows into something bigger.

That's where this book comes in.

We're going to talk about how to define a little addiction (versus a big addiction) and I'll give you some tips for how to dial these down so that they cost you a little less in terms of your time, mental health, energy and money. We're also going to look at some universal themes that span all of our little addictions. More on this later.

Whether your little addictions are scroll holes, wine binges, £50 takeaways, nicotine, people-pleasing, bread, social-stalking your ex, the next episode, biscuit binges or casual hook ups you later regret . . . I'm here to help.

After all, I've been known to do all of those things *in one night*.

Dubious honour, huh. Why listen to me, then? Well, I've already helped thousands of people quit drinking, stop being relentlessly negative and/or

refrain from dating like it's a job – I have the beautiful thank-you emails to prove it – and now I am here to help you, no matter what your thing(s) might be. And, crucially, what the thing(s) after that might be. Because they are coming for you, just like a *Game of Thrones* winter.

Little addictions are a moving target, a shapeshifting thing. I used to have a serious little addiction to TV. I once watched eight straight hours of *Selling Sunset* (for those too cerebral to know, this is a reality show about bougie house-selling in LA, with realtors that dress more like Lady Gaga than estate agents).

From 6pm until 2am, I clicked 'next episode' like a lab rat pushing a lever to get a treat. This didn't have any real-life consequences whatsoever, other than causing my eyeballs to sting, helping me work out that my flat was the square footage of a four-car garage and making me feel like shit that I didn't have an infinity pool. (I also wore some bizarre outfits to work over the ensuing days.)

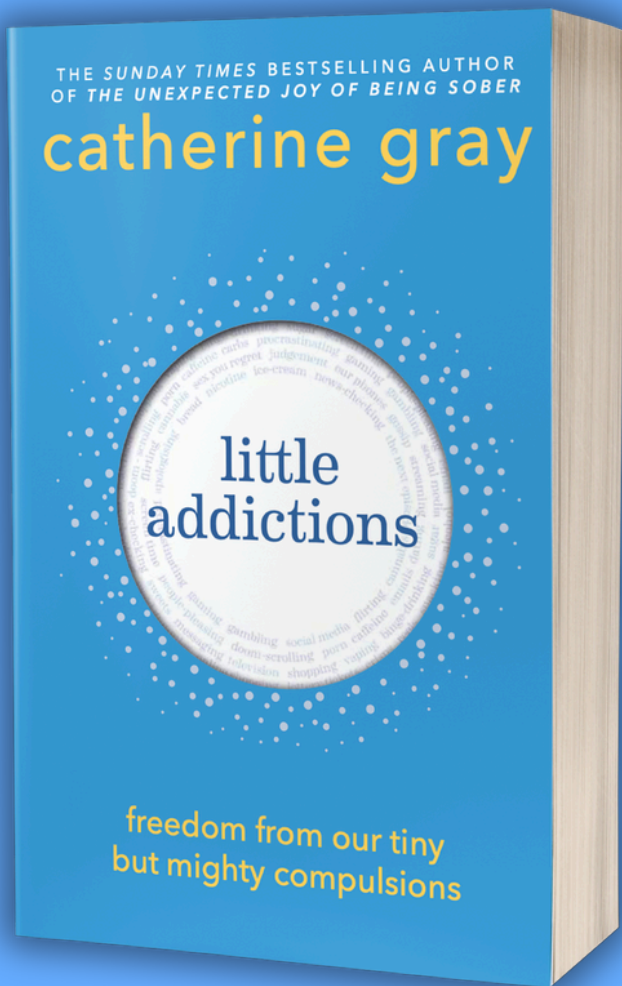
Now that I'm a parent to a toddler, I physically couldn't watch TV from 6pm until 2am. The bedtime routine doesn't finish until 9pm most nights, and even if I tried to binge-watch TV, my body would intervene and make me fall asleep on the sofa. Because, I am very tired a lot of the time. And so, my little addiction to TV has shrunk somewhat, while another little addiction has upsized: SUGAR.

Up until recently, I've been fairly restrained around ice cream, being able to make a tub of Häagen-Dazs last four sittings, but nowadays: gimme that tub, hold my tea and watch while I melt it down in the microwave and chug it in one.

But just because I don't have the time for hours of TV any more, it doesn't mean my 'next episode' lever-pulling is gone for life. It's still there, resurfacing on the rare occasion I have time to indulge it. And even after I wrangle the ice cream thing down, there'll probably be another thing, and another thing, and *another*. Once I've caught one strand of my human fallibility, another breaks loose.

That is why this book covers a total of 15 little addictions. Our current mix of tiny compulsions could look slightly – or even very – different in a year or two.

That's how and why this book is good value. If dominating all of our little addictions is like trying to catch a jellyfish in a bucket, while its tentacles flail and creep over the side, this book is a field guide on how to – humanely, gently, beautifully – catch the entire jellyfish.



A little at a time, it might even change your life...

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