

The Mental Load Guide

FOR THE WOMAN WHO'S CARRYING IT ALL



by Zach Watson

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It's never about the dishes.

"Why do I have to say this again?" You've asked yourself that more times than you can count. You've taught him, he's done it twice, and then it lands right back on you, and when you bring it up, somehow you're the nag. You're not even sure when the frustration hardened into resentment. You just know the pile is big now, and it started with something as small as a spoon.

You're not alone. I hear you. That's why I wrote this guide.

First, the words.

The moment you have these terms, you can label and see things you couldn't see before. That's not a small thing. Naming the invisible is how it stops being invisible.

- 1 Invisible Labor**
The umbrella term. All the work that keeps a household running that no one sees, values, or thanks anyone for. The four types below all live under it.
- 2 Domestic Labor**
The physical work. Dishes, laundry, cleaning, cooking, yard work. It's the most visible of the invisible, which is why it's usually the only one that gets talked about.
- 3 Clerical Labor**
The paperwork of family life. RSVPs, calendar invites, booking appointments, paying bills, buying the plane tickets, canceling the subscription. Small clicks. Constant clicks.
- 4 Cognitive Labor (the Mental Load)**
The remembering, planning, calculating, and anticipating. It happens entirely in your head, which means no one can see you doing it, and no one can see you drowning in it.
- 5 Emotional Labor**
Managing the feelings of the household, including your own. Anticipating moods, smoothing conflict, making sure everyone is okay. The work of caring about how everyone else is doing, on top of everything else.

Why trying harder hasn't fixed it.

There's a big fight. He does better. Things calm down. His effort fades. Things slide. Another big fight. Reset. I call it **The Do Better Loop™**, and I lived in it for years, doing more than the other men in my life ever did and still failing. The loop doesn't break with more effort. It breaks when the invisible work becomes visible, in words that don't feel like an accusation.

FIGHT → BETTER → CALM → SLIDE → FIGHT

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The words in action.

Here's what these terms look like in one ordinary moment:

ADDS TO THE LOAD

What do you want from the store?

While this domestic labor sounds helpful, it lands the cognitive labor (mental load) back on you. Now you're building the list, remembering what's low, deciding what's for dinner.

REMOVES SOME OF THE LOAD

"I'm going to the store at 6. I looked at what was low, made a list, and sent it to you. I'm grabbing your usual coffee unless you tell me otherwise."

Same store. Same errand. But now the list, the remembering, and the deciding all moved out of your head and into his. That shift, small as it looks, is the mental load moving.

You've been trying to say it. Start here.

You don't have to have the whole conversation. You just have to open the door.

- 1 *"I read something today about mental load, and I recognized myself in it. Would you be open to hearing the one thing that hit me hardest?"*
- 2 *"I realized a lot of what's wearing me out isn't the chores. It's the planning and the remembering. Can I show you one quick example of what I mean?"*
- 3 *"I'm not trying to start a fight. I found a short guide that finally put words to something I haven't been able to explain. Would you look at one page of it with me?"*

If even starting this conversation feels like too much, or you've tried and it goes sideways, that's exactly where I step in.

Let me do the talking.

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These five terms and these three lines are a taste of what's inside The Same Page: three short videos where I talk directly to your partner, so you don't have to.

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