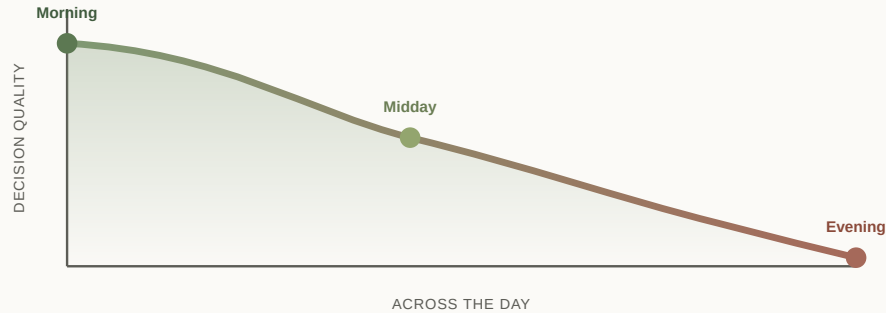


Decision Fatigue

WHY THE QUALITY OF OUR CHOICES CAN DECLINE THROUGH THE DAY

Making decisions — even small ones — draws on limited cognitive resources. As the number of decisions builds across a day, many people notice their judgement becoming less careful, more impulsive, or more prone to avoidance.



Common Early Signs

- Taking longer than usual over small choices
- Feeling irritable when asked to decide something
- Procrastinating on decisions rather than making them

Later, More Depleted Signs

- Defaulting to the easiest option, regardless of quality
- Impulsive decisions with little consideration
- Avoiding decisions altogether

Working With Decision Fatigue

1

DECIDE IMPORTANT THINGS EARLY

Where possible, make significant decisions earlier in the day, before cognitive resources are more depleted.

2

REDUCE SMALL DECISIONS

Routines, defaults and simple rules (like a set weekly meal plan) can reduce the number of minor decisions you need to make.

3

TAKE REAL BREAKS

Short breaks — especially away from screens — can help restore some capacity for the decisions still ahead.



The original "ego depletion" theory described willpower as a fuel tank that empties with use, but this specific model has faced significant scientific challenge, including failed replication attempts. More recent research points to a mix of factors — including motivation, attention and personal beliefs about willpower — rather than a single depleting resource. The everyday experience of feeling more decision-fatigued later in the day remains well-documented, even as scientists debate exactly why.

Beyond the "Empty Tank" Idea

Motivation Matters

Some studies suggest people who believe willpower is unlimited show fewer signs of fatigue — our beliefs about our own resources may shape how depleted we actually feel.

Attention, Not Just Willpower

Newer models (drawing on Kahneman's fast/slow thinking) suggest fatigue may reflect strained attention and working memory, not a single "muscle" running out.

Protecting your best thinking for what matters most is not a weakness — it's a strategy.

SOURCES

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