

# Decisions, decisions!

Keep a cool head and avoid the psychological phenomenon known as decision fatigue

## Defining decision fatigue

Drawing on Freud's theory of ego depletion, which argues that our willpower and self-control suffer when we're mentally drained, social psychologist Roy F Baumeister came up with the concept of decision fatigue. Baumeister found that it becomes harder for people to make sensible, well-thought-through decisions over an extended period involving continual decision-making, because our mind starts functioning less efficiently when overexerted.

## The Consequences

The inability to make compromises and trade-offs, acting impulsively and making rash decisions, impaired self-control and bad judgement.

## DECISION FATIGUE FACTS AND FINDINGS

One of the most popular studies done to prove decision fatigue and its effects was done by researchers from Ben-Gurion and Columbia Universities on more than 1100 parole hearings. They found that, 'the percentage of favourable rulings drop[ped] gradually from [roughly] 65% to nearly zero' as the day progressed and then, 'return[ed] abruptly to [roughly] 65% after a break'. This was significant, because it meant that the freedom of those prisoners were more dependent on the time of day and the judges' mental capacities to make a decision than on anything else.

Former President Obama, Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs all stuck to the same suit or outfit every day to eliminate as many trivial decisions as possible.

According to Jim Sollisch from *The Wall Street Journal* it has been found that, 'The average American adult makes 35 000 decisions a day.'

## FIGHTING OFF DECISION FATIGUE

### 1. If you have to make good decisions later in the day, then eat something first

No one can think on an empty stomach, let alone have clear judgement.

### 2. Plan daily decisions the night before

These are the common, recurring decisions that you can predict in advance – what to wear, what to eat and so on. This saves energy for more important, unpredictable decisions.

### 3. Do the most important thing first

When you still have the energy and mental capacity for it, before other things start demanding your attention.

### 4. Delegate decisions

It's okay to allow someone else to make the decisions every now and then. Just make sure you're giving the right people that responsibility.

### 5. Simplify

Let go of things that are out of your control. Cut out as many sideline decisions as possible. Tackle three decisions at a time when you feel overwhelmed by choices. Try building towards a minimalist approach to life.

### 6. Commit

Once you make a decision, commit to it and schedule it into your day, so you don't second-guess yourself. **E.**