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Decide For Me, Please!

A recent article in the *New York Times* explored the concept of Decision Fatigue, the idea that you cannot make decision after decision without paying a two-fold price. First, you'll become mentally tired, depleting the energy you had available for other essential activities (e.g. problem-solving). Second, your decision-making will be hampered because the more choices you make, the harder each one becomes.

Why is decision-making so taxing? Think about the last time you were faced with buying a big-ticket item such as a vehicle or a major appliance. It takes energy to weigh one's choices and to consider trade-offs, and when pressed few of us like giving up our options. After making too many decisions, our brains will look for shortcuts. One type of shortcut is to become reckless, acting impulsively instead of thinking through the consequences. The other type of shortcut is to do nothing, avoiding the choice completely.

Numerous studies have confirmed the concept of Decision Fatigue. In one study, researchers interviewed shoppers in a mall and then asked them to solve simple arithmetic problems. The researchers asked them to do as many problems as possible but gave them the option of quitting at any time. Those shoppers who had already made the most shopping decisions gave up on the math problems more quickly.

Once decision fatigue sets in, people frequently settle for what others recommend. Consider how this impacts important business decisions you need to make. Want to make better decisions? Try not to make critical choices at the end of a busy day when you're tired, hungry, and have already made dozens of decisions. If possible, reduce the number of decision points in your day by developing preferred routines and to-do lists. When a matter involves a sequence of decisions, try to position the most important ones early in the process.

-Larry Gard, Ph.D.