

How Sleep Deprivation Affects Decision Making



It's 3am. The dog won't stop barking; the baby continues to cry; and the upstairs neighbours seem to be a herd of elephants. This is the third consecutive night of next-to-no sleep and when you catch the wrong bus to work the next morning, you know something's not quite right!

If you've ever been sleep deprived, it feels like torture. You struggle to form thoughts; words tumble from your mouth without structure; and you make decisions that might be considered unusual or risky had you been thinking straight.

So what impact does sleep deprivation have on decision making? And what strategies can you use to avoid sleep deficiency?

Importance of Sleep

Quite simply, you need sleep...your survival depends on it. This may sound dramatic but [studies](#) show that sleep deprived animals have a greatly reduced lifespan compared to those that have regular sleep cycles.

[Sleep](#) allows the body to rejuvenate and repair itself, enables the nervous system to function properly and is needed for growth and development. It is important for learning, creativity, problem-solving and decision making.

What Happens Without Sleep?

[Sleep deprivation](#) alters brain activity and has many negative impacts. The risk of heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, stroke and obesity increases in people who are sleep deprived. Mental health is also affected with depression, suicide and risk-taking behaviours all being linked to sleep deficiency.

Decision making abilities are certainly affected by sleep deprivation. A recent [study](#) found that decision making in sleep deprived individuals was significantly impaired compared to those who were not deprived. Reactions were blunted, attention-span was reduced and memory affected which lead to “bad” decisions being made.

Getting Enough Sleep

It seems that the answer to making good decisions is to get enough sleep. Easier said than done of course, but here’s a few [tips](#) that may help avoid sleep deprivation:

- Set a regular sleep schedule
- Exercise
- Avoid caffeine, nicotine and alcohol
- Relax before bed

Sleep Well

Scientists are still unsure what mechanisms in the brain actually impair the decision making process but it is evident that sleep deprivation is a key player when it comes to questionable decisions.

What are your tips for getting enough sleep and making the right decisions? They may just help someone avoid getting on the wrong plane, marrying the wrong person or even save their life!

Photo: Jordan Whitt, [Unsplash](#)