NEWS LESSON

Why the Evening Decision Feels Harder Than the Day's Work



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. When can a day of sitting still leave someone exhausted?
2. What makes your mind feel crowded?
3. Would you rather take a quiet break or do something completely different?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**cognitive**	☐	A	to do with thinking and remembering
2	**participants**	☐	B	making pictures of the inside of the body, such as the brain
3	**imaging**	☐	C	people who take part in a study
4	**willingness**	☐	D	being ready and happy to do something
5	**productivity**	☐	E	deciding that something is not important
6	**psychological**	☐	F	a feeling of great worry or unhappiness
7	**distress**	☐	G	to do with the mind and feelings
8	**dismissing**	☐	H	how much work a person gets done

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

After a day of emails and small decisions, even choosing dinner feels hard. Twenty-eight people in a 2025 study became less willing to take on demanding tasks, even for greater rewards.

1 At the end of a day filled with emails, meetings and small decisions, you may feel too exhausted to do anything enjoyable. Yet when somebody asks what you have been doing, it can seem difficult to explain. There was no heavy lifting or long journey, just hours of thinking. Why does mental work leave us feeling drained?

2 After a day of difficult conversations, paperwork and small decisions, someone may feel worn out despite barely moving. It does not mean their tiredness is imaginary or that exercise is pointless.

3 Researchers describe this experience as cognitive fatigue. In a 2025 Journal of Neuroscience study, 28 participants performed demanding tasks before making decisions about further mental effort and possible rewards. After becoming fatigued, they were less willing to choose more demanding options, even when those options could bring greater benefits.

4 The researchers also used brain imaging to investigate how mental exertion might influence the value people attach to future effort. Their work suggests that fatigue can change our willingness to take on difficult tasks. It does not mean that the brain has simply run out of energy like a phone with an empty battery.

5 Everyday life contains plenty of possible sources of mental strain. Someone may need to organise a family, deal with a difficult customer or manage financial uncertainty while completing ordinary work. A day can involve constant attention and emotional pressure even when there is little physical activity. The challenge is recognising when ordinary tiredness has become a warning sign. If exhaustion persists, changes suddenly or affects daily life, it's sensible to look beyond productivity advice and seek medical guidance.

6 There are important limits to this explanation. The experiment was relatively small, and persistent tiredness has many possible causes, including health conditions, sleep problems and psychological distress. No study of decision-making should be used to diagnose a person's exhaustion.

7 The relationship between mental effort and everyday decisions becomes especially visible in the evening. After hours of concentrating, planning dinner or organising the following day can seem less attractive than choosing the easiest available option. This does not mean that a fixed supply of decision-making energy has been used up; that popular explanation is too simple.

8 Rather, fatigue may change how costly an additional task feels compared with its benefits. People sometimes respond by simplifying routine decisions, taking genuine breaks or sharing responsibilities at home. Yet such strategies have limits when the real problem is excessive demands or poor sleep. Being tired should not automatically become another personal efficiency challenge that requires a complicated system to manage.

9 Still, the findings challenge the idea that only physical activity can justify feeling tired. Mental demands are real demands. Recognising them may help people build breaks into their schedules, share responsibilities and take recovery seriously rather than dismissing exhaustion simply because they have been sitting down.

Sources: Journal of Neuroscience. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer accepts that tiredness after mental work is a real experience. T F NG
2. The 2025 study proved that people have a fixed supply of decision-making energy that runs out. T F NG
3. Most of the participants in the study were university students. T F NG
4. The small size of the study and the many other causes of tiredness both mean it cannot be used to diagnose a person. T F NG
5. After they became fatigued, participants chose harder options more often when the reward was bigger. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

costly	efficiency	exertion	genuine	guidance	justify	strain	uncertainty

1. The shop manager's _____ about next month's sales made it hard for him to plan.
2. Working two jobs for a year put a serious _____ on her health.
3. If you are unsure how much sleep you need, ask a doctor for _____ .
4. Her apology sounded _____ , so everyone believed she meant it.
5. Being busy does not _____ ignoring your friends.
6. Replacing every old computer in the building would be _____ for a small firm.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time she got home, she _____ nothing since breakfast. (EAT)
2. The experiment _____ in a university laboratory last year. (CARRY OUT)
3. If you _____ enough tonight, tomorrow will feel even harder. (NOT SLEEP)
4. She avoids _____ her phone after nine o'clock. (CHECK)
5. While I _____ dinner, the phone rang. (COOK)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. After a noun or adjective, the preposition is usually fixed. Learn the whole phrase, not just the word.

at	by	for	in	of	on	with

1. A lack _____ sleep is a common cause of tiredness.
2. Too many late nights can result _____ poor concentration.
3. Your energy for the evening depends _____ how the day went.
4. Managers are responsible _____ setting realistic workloads.
5. Many people struggle to cope _____ constant interruptions.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What kind of break helps when you are tired of making decisions?
2. What could a workplace change before telling people to manage stress better?
3. Should feeling tired be enough reason to stop for a while?

9 Role-play: who cooks tonight?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the tired partner

You've spent the whole day at a desk, answering emails and making decisions. You're exhausted and you don't want to cook or even choose dinner. Ask for help and suggest a simple plan.

Student B · the other partner

You've had a busy day too, and you're hungry. You think sitting down all day isn't really tiring. Ask questions, then agree a fair plan for tonight and for the rest of the week.

Useful phrases

I've had a really long day, and I can't think any more.

I know I've been sitting down, but my head is exhausted.

Could you choose something for dinner tonight?

I'd cook, but I've got no energy left.

How about we share the cooking this week?

That's fair, as long as we're both happy with it.

Afterwards, tell the class: what plan did you agree, and who got the better deal?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 A · 2 C · 3 B · 4 D · 5 H · 6 G · 7 F · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 uncertainty · 2 strain · 3 guidance · 4 genuine · 5 justify · 6 costly

6 Verb forms

1 had eaten · 2 was carried out · 3 don't sleep · 4 checking · 5 was cooking

7 Language focus

1 of · 2 in · 3 on · 4 for · 5 with

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