



Fatigue Reduction: How Fatigue Affects Your Decision Making

What impact does fatigue have on decision making?

If we get less sleep than we need, or our sleep is poor quality, for successive days, our brain changes.

Normally, if we are given a task to complete (like adding up a series of numbers), the parts of the brain responsible for performing the task would receive additional blood sugar to power it. When we're fatigued, there's a reduction in blood sugar available to the brain

Certain parts of the brain are more affected than others, and the pre-frontal cortex, is affected more than any other region of the brain. The pre-frontal cortex controls our ability to:

- Think and use language
- Use reason and judgement
- Make complex decisions
- Control our mood
- Assess risk

This is why fatigued people are poor communicators, tend to be irritable and quick tempered, take more risks and make poor decisions.

When we're fatigued, we struggle to understand complex situations because our mental capacity is impaired.

Complex decision making...

When we're fatigued and faced with a situation we've not come across before, we struggle to make sense of the situation and resort to habit: we do what we have done in the past, rather than recognising that this new situation requires a different approach.

Fatigue impairs our ability to perform tasks like:

- **Setting operational priorities**
- **Assessing risk related to the work we are doing**
- **Decisions involving uncertainty**

This explains why some of the worst industrial accidents in the last 50 years (e.g. Chernobyl) occurred: fatigued people, who were insufficiently alert and didn't have the mental capacity to understand the situation, resorted to habit, but tragically, that was not enough.

