
The Decision Detox Program

**Jaimie Bloch
&
HelloFresh**

An eBook to help you reset your mind, reclaim your time and free yourself from decision fatigue.

Jaimie Bloch



Jaimie Bloch is a leading Clinical Psychologist, Behavioural Specialist, researcher and program developer, working with youth and adults within a range of contexts since 2007.

An expert behavioural consultant, Jaimie has spent years studying and perfecting her craft with a Bachelor of Psychological Science, a Bachelor of Psychological Science (Honours), a Graduate Diploma of Professional Psychology and a Masters of Psychology (Clinical).

Jaimie uses her flair for creativity to encompass both holistic and evidence based approaches when developing comprehensive intervention plans, and setting up support systems for individuals and families.

She enjoys teaching, researching, developing programs and writing articles that meld Western Psychology, Philosophy, Human Social Psychology and the neuroscience behind the brain.

Decision Fatigue is affecting us more than we think

Daily decisions are a huge contributor to our ongoing stress, mental strain and emotional fatigue. This is largely due to the number of decisions we have to make every day. Recent research by HelloFresh reveals 1 in 10 (11%) Australians think they make up to 100 decisions a day. The real figure is much higher - around 70 conscious and 226 unconscious decisions are made in one day on food alone.

Just like your body, your brain can get tired simply from making decisions all day. This is termed decision fatigue. Roy Baumeister, a social psychologist who has studied the effects of decision fatigue, found that the neurological mechanisms used when exercising our willpower and saying no are the same used when we make decisions. Every decision we make takes effort and depletes energy from our internal “decision-making tank”. This tank only has a finite supply of decision-making energy per day before fatigue sets in.

We go on diet detoxes so we can realign our eating habits. We know we should have social media detoxes and disconnect from the online world for a few days a month. We even have whole months dedicated to giving up drinking. But what we often overlook when we think about improving our mental, physical and emotional clarity is detoxing from everyday decisions.

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Decisions, decisions, decisions

Every decision you make throughout the day chips away at the reserves in your internal decision-making tank. The more choices we are faced with, the more decisions we have to make, the more fatigued your mind becomes, causing your brain to look for decision shortcuts to conserve energy.

Researchers from Duke University found that these mental shortcuts lead people to make irrational decisions, specifically when that shortcut is making quick and impulsive decisions. Other times, our brain takes a shortcut by going blank and then making no decision at all.

Too much choice, therefore, directly creates psychological and physiological stress in our body. Think about it: if we're using all of our mental energy every day making countless decisions, we have less time and mental power to devote to other important things in our life; education, relationships, exercise, work and overall wellbeing. All of these things contribute to the phenomenon of decision fatigue. This is where the implementation of a “Decision Detox” comes in. Just like cleansing and resetting our bodies through a diet detox, having a Decision Detox can be an easy and life changing way to reset and refocus our minds.

If you are looking for a way to cleanse your mind from stress, and kick start your week feeling energised, balanced and clear, try this 1-Day or 3-Day Decision Detox Program. Both detox plans are self-directed and should easily fit into your life.

What is a Decision Detox?

A Decision Detox is a challenge that simply **reduces choice and **maximises mental clarity** by giving the mind a break.**

Why detox?

A detox is a great way to reset your internal systems, be that a reset of your body or mind. We often get stuck in repetitive behaviours, whether they are helpful or unhelpful. Detoxes give us the ability to pause and reset old habits, so that we can have space to create new ones that will serve us and help us continue to grow.

You may have noticed that you are feeling run down, overwhelmed or foggier than usual. Maybe you've noticed you are making more impulsive decisions, or you're not able to make decisions at all. Whatever your reason may be, both the 1-Day and 3-Day Cleanse will help you in supporting a realignment in your mindset.

The Decision Detox Plan

1-Day Decision Cleanse

This first step to detoxifying your decision-making habits can be used as a 1 day only cleanse, or as part of the 3 day Decision Detox. It focuses on the following areas in your day:

Food: Taking time to understand your current eating and food preparation habits

Wardrobe: Understanding how streamlining choices about clothes can free up mental space

Work: Managing your day in a way that your decision-making tank is optimised

First up - decide the day or week you will implement the cleanse. It is important to pick a typical and relatively normal day and week in your diary. Choose a day with no planned major tasks for work due or big events in the family. It is important to keep stress on the day of the cleanse as minimal as possible.

Food Decisions

Food related decisions deplete a staggering amount of mental energy daily. Having a plan around your food for the day will not only conserve a lot of mental power, but it will also free up your time so that you can be more efficient throughout the day.

In this beginning phase of the cleanse, it will be important to make some time three days before you begin to sit down and understand what your normal food day looks like.

Wardrobe Decisions

Ever wondered why high-profile people like Steve Jobs and Barack Obama chose to wear the same clothing ensembles every day? It's because they have already been decision detoxing their wardrobes!

Three Tips to Get You Started

Reduce Choices

Scrap the endless options! Give yourself no more than 2 choices for each meal. That way you will still have variety that you can choose from, but you won't be straining your mind with endless options.

Glucose is Your Friend

To boost your brain power, have a high glucose snack before making any decisions.

Outsource without the Guilt

Use meal planning services like HelloFresh. They curate 3, 4 or 5 meals into a balanced plan with a variety of cuisines and proteins, and then send you a weekly box filled with the ingredients portioned out to the recipes.

“The less rudimentary decisions you have to make every day, such as what to wear, the more energy you are conserving and mental clarity you are creating around your ability to make important decisions within the day or week.”

Barack Obama told Vanity Fair in 2012 that, “You’ll see I wear only grey or blue suits. I’m trying to pare down decisions. I don’t want to make decisions about what I’m eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make. You need to focus your decision-making energy. You need to routinise yourself. You can’t be going through the day distracted by trivia.”

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Three Tips to Get You Started

Start Right

Don’t spend the morning getting bogged down by choice. Choose an outfit the night before and lay everything out.

Plan Ahead

Check what the weather will be the night before to plan outfits that are easy without being repetitive.

Be Mindful

Once dressed, don’t think about your outfit - shift your attention to a task that really requires your mental energy. Distracted by your clothes? Try a quick and simple grounding exercise like the 5 Sense Check In.

Quick Mindfulness Activities

The 5 Sense Check In

Describe 5 things you can see around you
Name 4 things you can touch and touch them
Name 3 things you hear right now
Name 2 things you can smell right now
Name 1 thing you can taste in your mouth

Body Awareness

This mindful activity can be done sitting or standing with eyes open or shut. Place all of your awareness and attention onto the bottom of your feet. Roll your feet forward to the balls of your foot and then back to the heel. Pay attention to any sensation that may come up.

Repeat for one minute.

Work Decisions

Simplify your work decisions. When looking at paring back work decisions, it's important to sit down and review your general day-to-day activities. Spend time assessing what your typical day looks like. Make time for this a few days before your cleanse.

It often feels like we're constantly being faced with tedious decisions during the work day. Which email should I answer first? What task should I start? When should I take a break? Have I spent too long on this one task? Research conducted by RescueTime, a time productivity software, found that employees can switch between tasks over 300 times in a work day. This means we are likely wasting mental energy making many unnecessary decisions throughout our day, which can leave us feeling cognitively fatigued and reliant on our decision-making shortcuts. Decluttering your daily work decisions is a great way to simplify and reduce choices in your work hours and conserve mental energy for bigger more important work tasks or decisions.

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Now that we have reduced choices, it's time to create your plan for the first day of the Decision Detox, called the 1-Day Cleanse. Create your plan three days before you undertake the cleanse and try your best to stick to it. The more wholeheartedly you commit, the better the results will be!

3-Day Decision Detox Program

This more intense detox will focus on the following areas over three days:

Day 1: Removing choice in a “1-Day Cleanse”

Day 2: Build a decision-making process

Day 3: Implementing and creating routines

Day 1

Once you're ready to start your 3-Day Decision Detox Program, start with the 1-Day Cleanse on page 6. When you've completed the first day, you can move on to the next step! Remember, it's important to undertake the cleanse on a typical day in your routine.

Day 2

Building a decision-making process

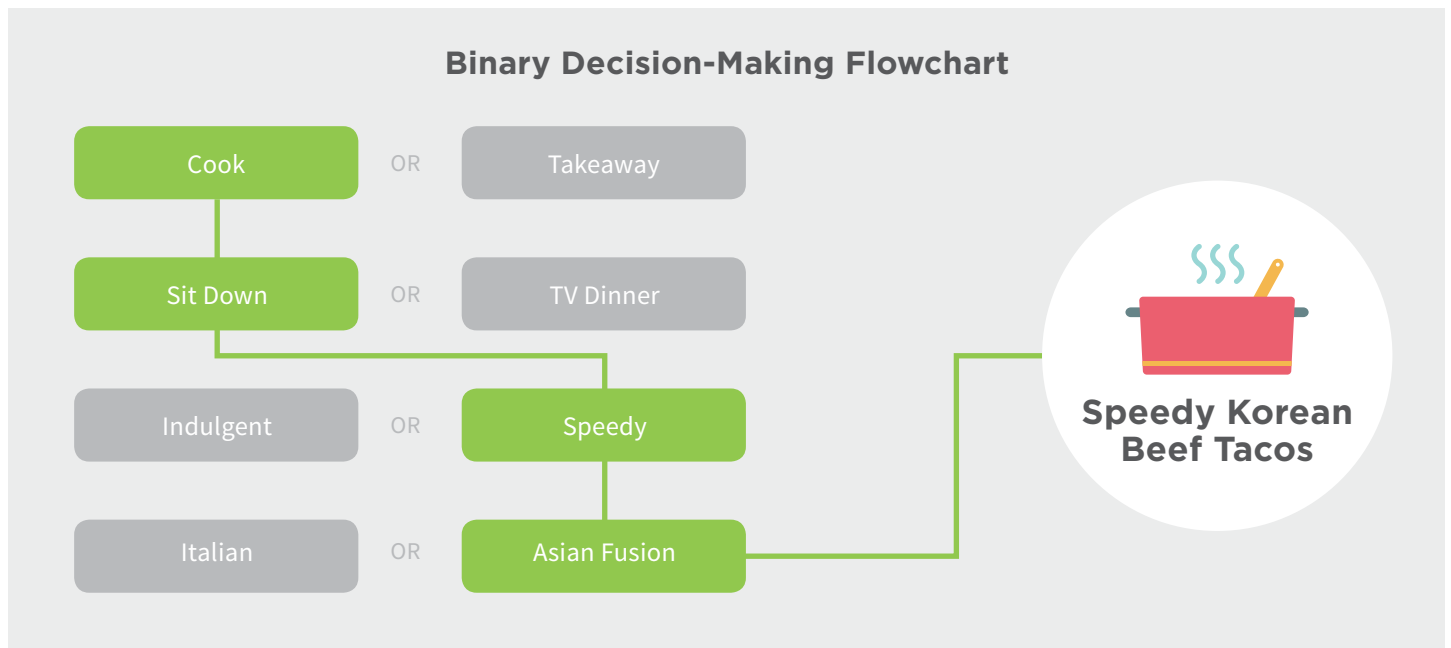
It's important to know that the quickest way to build up your mental energy and reduce fatigue is to eliminate choices and mental decision-making tasks. Whilst the 1-Day Cleanse will make you feel revitalised and support restoring energy into your mental bank, we need to do more to solve the problem in a lasting way. Day 2 is when we realise that sometimes unexpected things occur in our day-to-day activity, therefore creating a decision-making process for these unexpected moments will support you in reducing decision stress long term. In day 2 you will be trialling a simple decision-making process.

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Binary Decision-Making

Charles Duhigg in his book 'Smarter Faster Better' describes binary decision-making as breaking down every decision into two choices. We know that simplifying choices and options makes decisions easier and less energy draining, but we're not computers!

While putting all life's decisions into binary codes isn't the answer, we can use this decision-making method for the more simple yet draining tasks that face us each day - what we eat, what we wear and what tasks we start when. A simple way to test this decision-making style in day 2 is to isolate binary decisions to food related choices you will be making.



As you can see from this example, binaries create a really straightforward and simple method for tackling the small but frequent choices we make throughout the day. By creating two options, decision-making is quicker and one decision has a flow on affect in supporting and reducing mental strain in making the next decision.

Check It Out

Because each decision we make adds to the deterioration of our energy reservoir, the use of a checklist for the many decisions we make each day that are the same conserves both time and decision capacity.

Atul Gawande in his book 'The Checklist Manifesto', described how this decision-making method is primarily used by U.S Air Force. The checklist approach has been found to be extremely helpful when the brain is fatigued and stressed, specifically in situations where the brain becomes reliant on taking mental shortcuts such as in emergencies. Checklists can serve as reminders for what needs to be done, without us having to remember or to make any further decisions. This method can be utilised as either a reminder or a process within the day.

Tips for checklists:

- **Identify the tasks in your day that require repetitive and trivial decisions**, such as filling out excel sheets. These are the types of tasks that would benefit from a checklist. If there are repetitive tasks you find yourself making mistakes over, or forgetting in the day, try starting with these.
- **Simple steps**. The simpler the steps are in your checklist, the easier and smoother a task can be carried out.
- **Create subheadings within your checklist**. These subheadings could be divided into daily or weekly subheadings such as emails, household and social tasks.
- **Test the checklist**. Most of the time you will find the gaps you are missing only once you're put it into practice.
- **Write your checklist in the morning**. According to research, we have increased brainpower in the first two hours of waking up.

Day 3

Implementing and creating routines

In day 3 of the detox, you will be looking to create a morning and afternoon routine to safeguard against decision fatigue and to conserve brainpower in the long term. This will involve bringing together both day 1 and 2 by creating a morning and evening routine that streamlines menial tasks, reduces choice and implements a simple decision-making process. The goal here is to create positive decision-making habits, after the pause and reset the detox has afforded us.

In your morning and evening routine the following things should be considered:

- Self-care (meditation, exercise, amount of sleep and food)
- Schedule important meetings or decisions in the morning
- Eat before making decisions
- Schedule breaks into your routine after periods of work
- Wake up and go to sleep the same time everyday

Just like our muscles would fatigue if we lifted the same weight many times, our brain goes through a process of exhaustion when we make decisions all day. And, just like a muscle, we can train our brains to work more efficiently and successfully. Research has found that people who developed routines and habits are able to conserve their brain power and reduce everyday stress. The first step to creating this routine is setting it out on paper.

Try setting up a routine for every other day to give yourself some variety, and keep the order of things flowing in a natural, logical way for your day.

Morning Routine Sample

Monday-Wednesday-Friday

- 6.00am:** Wake up
- 6.15am:** Meditation (self-care strategy for the morning)
- 6.40am:** Shower and brush teeth
- 7.00am:** Get dressed in clothes chosen and laid out from night before
- 7.15am:** Makeup/hair care
- 7.30am:** Binary choice for breakfast e.g. eat in or breakfast out? Eat in. Omelette or porridge? Porridge
- 8.00am:** Write down checklist for day tasks and review and create goals for the day
- 8.15am:** Leave for work and reward for the end of the morning routine is getting a coffee/juice on the way to work

Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday

- 5.30am:** Wake up
- 6.00am:** Go for a walk or gym
- 7.15am:** Home from exercise - shower and brush teeth
- 7.30am:** Get dressed in clothes chosen and laid out from night before
- 7.45am:** Make up/hair care
- 8.00am:** Binary choice for breakfast e.g. eat in or breakfast out? Eat in. Omelette or porridge? Porridge
- 8.15am:** Write down checklist for day tasks and review and create goals for the day
- 8.30am:** Leave for work and reward for the end of the morning routine is getting a coffee/juice on the way to work

Evening Routine Sample

Evening Routine

- 5.30pm:** Arrive home
- 5.45pm:** Go through checklist from the morning (identify anything that has not been completed)
- 5.50pm:** Complete any tasks on the checklist e.g. finishing off work emails, paying due bills, returning calls/texts
- 6.15pm:** Binary choice for dinner e.g. homemade or take out? Homemade. Chicken roast or spaghetti bolognese? Chicken roast (food box with ingredients or weekly shop that was done on the weekend for dinner preparation for the week)
- 6.30pm:** Cook dinner
- 7.00pm:** Eat dinner and relax
- 7.45pm:** Clean up and pack leftovers for lunch
- 8.00pm:** Shower and get into pyjamas or loungewear
- 8.15pm:** Check weather for the next day and pick clothes
- 8.30pm:** Watch TV or relax with a book
- 10.00pm:** Review schedule for the next day and reward self with cup of tea or dessert
- 10.15pm:** Brush teeth
- 10.30pm:** Get into bed

Tips For Creating Your Routine

- **Be flexible:** if timing isn't for you, turn the morning and evening routine into more of a checklist. It is also ok to adapt your routine. Life changes, therefore your routine can change too.
- **Have a reminder:** have a defined trigger that prompts and reminds you to move into your routine. This may be your alarm in the morning and walking through the door in the evening.
- **Create clear and defined steps:** creating a process in routines so that one step flows into the next makes it more likely you'll stay with the plan. Being clear with your steps and process for your routine will help make things flow easily. This will make your mornings and nights run efficiently and conserve energy for bigger more important decisions throughout the day.
- **Reward yourself:** it is important to feel like you are working towards something. A reward doesn't have to be a present to yourself. The best type of rewards is scheduled at the end of the routine, so you feel like you are working towards it. An example could be a delicious coffee or juice in the morning routine or it could be your favourite TV show or tea and dessert in the evening routine.
- **Schedule in breaks:** research consistently finds that we mentally fatigue if we have to make constant decisions in a row. A good rule to stick to is the Pomodoro Technique. This technique states that breaking work up into sprints with breaks in between supports consistent productivity and conservation of brainpower.
- **Get into glucose:** multiple research studies have shown that food high in glucose eaten before decision-making tasks improves speed and efficiency of decision-making.
- **Stick to it:** It is important to stick to the routine for the first 60 days, as it takes that long to form a habit. Once a routine becomes habit, you will perform the tasks on autopilot, allowing mental space for other more important decisions.

With your mind reset and your new routine in place, you're really well positioned to start forming new, more productive habits around decision-making. Remember, sticking to the plan is more than half the battle! Don't beat yourself up if you have a small setback, but focus on the overall progress you're making. Before you know it, your new life of better decision-making will be second nature.

Good luck!

Resources

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