Stop Overthinking!

tips for better decision-making

Life is full of countless decisions, both big and small. **Overthinking** is when you devote too much time or energy trying to make the *perfect* decision, leading to anxiety and paralyzing doubt. Consider the suggestions below to tame overthinking and navigate decisions more smoothly:

Settle for "good enough" over "perfect."

The difficult truth is that you must make all decisions with only partial information. You'll never have time to consider things from all possible angles. Gathering too much information to make a "perfect" choice clouds your thinking and slows you down.

Try it out: *Set limits on how long to research or analyze. Then make a decision, even if it feels imperfect.*

Trust yourself over the opinions of others.

Asking for advice is helpful, but only to a point. Others may want the best for you, but have different goals or values. If you outsource your decision-making, you may lose trust in your own inner compass.

Try it out: *Instead of asking someone what to do, use the conversation to clarify what feels right to you.*

Distinguish between likely and unlikely outcomes.

Decision-making is agonizing if you fixate on the millions of things that *could* go wrong, but probably won't. Conserve your energy and reach clarity sooner by considering only the likely scenarios.

Try it out: *Write down possible outcomes for a decision you face. Cross out any that are unlikely to happen. Then circle the two or three most likely scenarios. Keep your focus on those as you decide.*

Make unimportant decisions more quickly.

Trivial decisions — like what toothbrush to buy — aren't worth your precious time and energy. If you can learn to breeze through small decisions, you'll be better equipped to take on big ones.

Try it out: *When obsessing about a decision, stop and ask yourself if it will matter in a week or a month. If not, go ahead and make it quickly. Then reward yourself for upping your decision-making game!*

Use your values as a roadmap.

Overthinking often happens when you rely too heavily on analysis. When it comes to big decisions, checking in with your values is a powerful way to get clarity.

Try it out: *List your top five values. When indecisive, consider which option would best honor these values.*

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Realize that *not* deciding is a decision.

It can be tempting to delay difficult or uncomfortable decisions. This may seem like a way of avoiding a bad outcome. But what you're really doing is allowing life to decide for you, which can make you feel passive and powerless.

Try it out: *Write down the consequences of endlessly delaying a decision. What might you miss out on?*

Recognize that some decisions may not feel good.

It's unrealistic to expect every decision to give you warm fuzzies. Many daily choices are likely to feel neutral, while big dilemmas can feel incredibly difficult, regardless of what you decide.

Try it out: *Write down the emotion you struggle with most when making decisions. List three ways you can cope with this feeling rather than overthinking or procrastinating.*

Accept that risk is unavoidable.

Every decision comes with some risk. Avoiding obviously dangerous decisions makes sense, but taking reasonable risks to move toward your goals is necessary to learn, grow, and thrive.

Try it out: *When faced with a tough decision, ask if it will bring you closer to a cherished goal or value. Is the risk worth the potential reward? What would be the risk of doing nothing?*

Know that every decision involves loss and compromise.

Loss is an inevitable part of decision-making. By choosing one path, you're forgoing another. If you choose to move to New York, you're choosing *not* to live in Seattle. But maybe part of you really wanted to live in Seattle. And that can be a heartbreaker.

Try it out: *After making a decision, acknowledge what you had to give up, but embrace the path you chose.*

Resist reversing decisions out of doubt.

You make a decision and then feel overcome by doubt. Sound familiar? It's tempting to reverse a decision to alleviate anxiety, but this rarely works. In fact, you'll probably want to reverse the reversal!

Try it out: *When feeling doubt, ask if there's something truly new to consider. If not, stay the course.*