

Making Hard Decisions

Are you pondering an important decision? Making a choice in your life? I'm sure someone has once told you to "weigh the pros and the cons". Well, we also suggest making a list! Try using a "Pros/Cons" list. Here's why it could be helpful.



Thoroughness- When you list all likely options on paper your mind goes through a lot of possible outcomes. Making the effort to list all the conceivable pros and cons to your action, will help minimize the possibility that serious factors will be missed. When you prioritize your possibilities, it promotes deeper thinking and can lead to better quality decision making.



Writing = deeper thinking.

Emotional Distance- Important decisions usually arouse very powerful emotions. Going through the steps of making a list of pros and cons can be seen as looking at the problem as an "external" problem. This can ease the impact of the emotions taking over the decision. When you take the time to analyze an important decision with a pros/cons list it reduces the risk of an emotionally impulsive choice. Scientists like to call that the "amygdala hijack", where perceived emotional threats lead to extreme actions (sometimes with not so great outcomes).



Simplicity- Guess what? Making a pros/cons list doesn't require any additional training or scientific data. All you really need is a pen and paper. It is really simple to administer. It's a good use for a straightforward, low cost, visual representation of options.



Time- Pondering about all of the possible outcomes to one decision may take some time. Allow yourself that period to think through those options. It may also be helpful to put that list away for a while and come back to it. Our mind often times thinks of things when we least expect it.

The Verdict- Pros/cons lists are helpful to get your possible outcomes on paper. However, they are not always helpful in actually making that decision. It may also be helpful to "rank" the items on your list. What is the best and worst case scenario? And are you able to handle that option? Put some kind of feelings or judgments around what is most important to you to make the decision. Then, you actually have to make it!



Check out our "Tools" tab for a Pros/Cons list to help you analyze some of your important decisions.

PROS/CONS

Dilemma: _____

Gut Feelings: _____

PROS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

CONS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Best Case Scenario: _____

Worst Case Scenario: _____

How does it make me feel?

Rational Decision: _____

Action Steps

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

