

# Make your happiest decisions in 2010!

Tuna sandwich or salad? Buy or rent? Have another child or go back to school? Work out or watch TV? Decision-making can be hard, unless you know these simple, study-proven secrets that guarantee you'll make the best decision every time!



## 1 Set a deadline!

Mulling a big issue, like whether to buy a house? Set a D-date and put it in writing. It'll spur you to stop flip-flopping, and it's also proven to make you happier, says Michael E. McGrath, author of *Decide Better! For a Better Life*. His research shows that more than 50% of us make key decisions by *not* deciding. Turns out, those non-choices are generally the ones we're least pleased with—because when you're committed to a choice, you're more likely to actively try to make it work!



## 3 Before buying that plasma TV, do this!

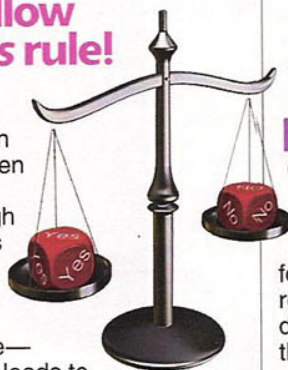
Take a 30-60 second break, advises UCLA's Wendy Liu, Ph.D. Smart as "going with your gut" can be at times, making snap decisions while shopping is *not*, she's found. "The marketing input makes it easy to ignore your own instincts." A momentary shift allows your mind to "reboot," reminding you of important priorities and ensuring the decision you ultimately make will reflect your agenda, not someone else's powers of persuasion!

## 4 Know when else not to go with your gut!

When's that? When you're dealing with an issue that's way outside your everyday norm. Rich as your internal storehouse of info may be, it's important to remember that it has gaps. So when you're in unfamiliar territory, start by doing your homework, like by trying the commute a few times from that house you're thinking of buying. Once you have, McGrath promises, any hunches you have are more likely to be reliable.

## 5 Follow this rule!

A common trap we can fall into when struggling with a tough decision is thinking we need to be 100% sure—which just leads to over-thinking, explains Robinson. Instead, she says, "ask yourself which choice feels slightly *more* right." That's your intuition—based on subconsciously stored info—talking, which will rarely steer you wrong, she says. And scientists agree! In research, people playing a gambling game were more successful playing "hunches" after being cued (so briefly, they couldn't consciously register it) on which bet would win. So, if you're drawn to one option, it's because you know more than you think you do!



## 7 Go with the facts, not a personal story!

Considering trying, say, a new aerobics class or a stop-smoking plan and then a friend tells you it didn't work for her? Keep doing your research, overriding the tendency we all have to decide on the basis of others' personal experience, says Michael J. Mauboussin, author of *Think Twice: Harnessing the Power of Counterintuition*. Stories have such a powerful emotional impact on us, they can cause you to ignore the facts, he explains.

The proof: **www.** Volunteers were asked to imagine they had a disease and had to choose between two medications—one, a 90%-effective drug they'd heard a negative story about, or two, a 40%-effective drug that they'd heard a positive story about. Result: Eight out of 10 chose the less-effective drug on the basis of that single positive anecdote, Mauboussin reports. Fortunately, just being aware of the power of other

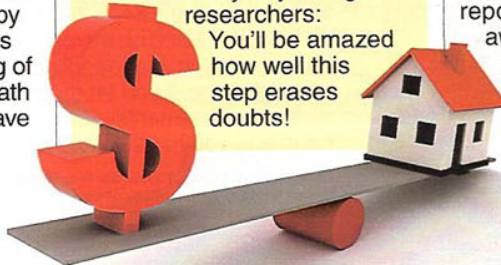
### Tip!

Studies show we're wired to make the best decisions between 9 and 11 o'clock in the morning!

## 6 Start with the right end!

Next time you're wavering between, perhaps, updating your kitchen or making do with the old one, ask yourself which means more—having your dream kitchen or having less debt! Narrowing the possibilities to just the end results helps clarify your thinking, according to a new study. Try it, urge researchers:

You'll be amazed how well this step erases doubts!



## 2 Try this "What if?"

Trying to decide whether to, say, find a new job, and keep coming up with worst-case scenarios like "What if I hate the new company?" Those "what ifs" increase anxiety, making deciding harder. Lynn Robinson, M.Ed., author of *Listen* suggests: Flip that "What if?" to a positive (e.g., "What if I had a job I loved?") and spend 30 seconds a day visualizing the answer—it'll allow you to make a more balanced decision.



—Barbara Hustedt Crook