



Key Points and Conclusions

- Willpower is the ability to resist short-term gratification in pursuit of long-term goals or objectives.
- Willpower is correlated with positive life outcomes, such as better grades, higher self-esteem, lower substance abuse rates, greater financial security and improved physical and mental health.
- When willpower fails, exposure to an emotionally charged stimulus overrides one's rational, cognitive system, leading to impulsive actions.
- One's capacity for self-control appears to be persistent. Those with better self-control as preschoolers tend to have better self-control as adults.
- Individuals with low self-control show differing brain patterns when presented with tempting stimuli.
- Willpower can be compared to a muscle that becomes fatigued with overuse. Studies show that repeatedly resisting temptation drains the ability to withstand future enticements.
- Willpower depletion has a physical basis. Individuals whose willpower has been depleted have decreased activity in a brain region involved with cognition and have lower blood-glucose levels than those whose willpower has not been diminished.
- The effects of willpower depletion may be mitigated by positive moods, beliefs and attitudes.
- Willpower depletion impacts a range of behaviors, including food intake, substance use and abuse, and purchasing behavior.
- Financial decision-making may be even more depleting for people living in poverty, since virtually all financial decisions are likely to represent difficult tests of self-control.
- Avoiding temptation and planning ahead are effective tactics for maintaining self-control in the face of temptation.
- With the right motivation, people may be able to persevere even when their willpower strength has been depleted.
- Maintaining steady blood-glucose levels, such as by eating regular healthy meals and snacks, may help prevent the effects of willpower depletion.
- Because being depleted in one area can reduce willpower in other spheres, it is more effective to focus on a single goal at a time rather than attacking a list of multiple resolutions at once.
- Just as muscles are strengthened by consistent exercise, regularly exerting self-control may improve willpower strength over time.

