

Study Shows the Perfect Number of Hours to Work Per Week for Your Brain to Function Best



By Evelyn Hill | [Lifhack](#)

Earlier this summer, a study focusing on the link between 40-hour work weeks and cognitive decline was published, and it's got a lot of people thinking.

The study, which was first reported by [Science Alert](#) and then picked up by various outlets, showed that people over the age of 40 actually *suffer* from 40-hour workweeks. Cognitive decline was significant in those that worked what we now consider to be the common workweek of eight hours a day, five days a week. **In fact, working anything more than a 25-hour workweek was deemed to be detrimental to the workforce.**

But before you ask for a new work schedule, let's go over the study and find out what it all means.

The Study

The [BBC](#) reports that the study was conducted by researchers at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research in Australia. The study had over 6,500 participants, with over 60% of them being women. All participants were aged 40 and over, held jobs, and had different work schedules. This included people who worked part-time and people who worked full time.

How the results were measured came in the form of three separate tests, all of which tested a cognitive ability. The three main tests focused on memory, reading, and perceptive ability.

What remains unclear, however, is exactly how this study was carried out. While it is assumed that the participants were given the tests at specific intervals and during different weeks, the actual method remains a mystery.

The Results

The results, however, were crystal clear – researchers found that **participants in the study that worked part-time, or around 25 hours a week, showed no signs of cognitive decline** when compared to those who worked full time. It is also interesting to note that **participants who worked less than 25 hours a week also showed low cognitive scores**, which pinpoints [25 hours](#) as the perfect workweek for everyone.

This might come as a surprise to you, especially since the common workweek is nearly twice as long as the new ideal workweek. But it can be explained using a few key factors that I'll share with you below.

Stress, Lack of Sleep, and How it Affects Cognitive Function

It'll come as no surprise that [stress](#) affects cognitive functioning, especially at work. This is because stress has been known to contribute to neuron loss in the brain. This is an important factor to keep in mind because more studies are needed to understand how stress inflames cognitive decline for people working full time.

A [lack of sleep](#) is also considered to be a factor in cognitive decline. As we age, a suitable amount of sleep is needed to keep us at our best. But studies have begun to show that pulling all-nighters or working overtime decreases the white matter in the brain, which leads to cognitive decline.

A Word on White Matter

[White matter](#) is a phrase that comes up in a lot of cognitive decline studies, and it came up in this study as well. It refers to the pathways neurons use in our brain for communication, language, memory, perception, and more. It's a vital factor in cognitive function.

When humans age, white matter decreases as the brain shrinks. **But in people who are working overtime and aren't getting enough sleep, the white matter decreases at a significant rate.** This is a preventable problem, so make sure you get as much sleep as you need in order to be your best self at work.

The Takeaway

This study showed that people over the age of 40 are at the risk of cognitive decline when working a 40-hour workweek. However, this study only focused on that age group and did not produce results for people aged 18-40, so the results are very

specific.

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