

A 25-hour work week for over-40s

By [Lisa Smith](#)

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Most people start working as soon as they complete their studies, which means in their early 20s. This cycle of work goes on forever unless the person reaches his or her retirement age, which is 58 in some countries and 60 in others. The reason why this age has been decided upon is that it has been cited that the cognitive power of people above the age of 60 is low. Thus, their performance at work may not be efficient enough.

However, new research indicates that people over the age of 40 lose cognitive ability after 25 hours of work and should preferably work a three-day week.

This is from '[Use It Too Much and Lose It? The Effect of Working Hours on Cognitive Ability](#)' by researchers Shinya Kajitani, Colin McKenzie and Kei Sakata with the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, at the University of Melbourne.

This was found when an Australian agency tested 3500 men and 3000 women. The agency studied their work habits and then conducted some tests, which analysed the functioning of their brain. After studying these people for a whole week, some very surprising results came forth.

It was observed that for the first 25 hours of the work hours, all the people were quite efficient and performed well. They completed all their work on time and even displayed good results in the brain function tests.

However, when the work hours exceeded 25 hours, the working efficiency of the people seemed to diminish with every passing hour. There were more apparent errors and problems in meeting predestined deadlines. The cognitive thinking and analysis power of these people too seemed to diminish with every additional work hour. The studies further proved that people who were subjected to 50 hours of work displayed poor results in the various cognitive tests that were conducted.

Thus, what this study brought to fore is that people above the age of 40, work efficiently and effectively only for a span of 25 hours in a week. Thus, it was advised that just as people over the age of 58 are expected to retire, it would be a good idea that governments pass a rule for the people over the age of 40 to work 25 hours a week.

This would mean that any person who is above 40 works for three days in a week on an average. On the other hand, there is nothing wrong in quitting a full time job and picking a part time one. This would ensure that the person is able to function efficiently and does not give undue strain and stress to his brain. Long working hours can not only reduce the efficiency and result in cognitive fatigue but can also result in more stress due to increased number of errors and inability to complete tasks on time.

An expert explains that work is extremely important as it stimulates one's brain and exercises it to think in a better way. However, beyond a certain age, which has now been revealed as 40, the brain can function in a normal way only up to a certain level. Beyond this, it starts showing signs of fatigue and there is a fair chance that you overwork it. Therefore, though work is important, overwork can actually hinder one's cognitive thinking and analysis.

The research concluded, "Using the test scores of memory span and cerebral dysfunction for the respondents, it is found that working hours up to 25–30 hours per week have a positive impact on cognition for males depending on the measure and up to 22–27 hours for females. After that, working hours have a negative impact on cognitive functioning. This indicates that the differences in working hours are an important factor for maintaining cognitive functioning in middle and older adults. In other words, in the middle and older age, working part-time could be effective in maintaining cognitive ability. It is worth noting that our findings did not show any statistically significant gender differences in the effects of working hours on cognitive functioning. Our study highlights that too much work can have adverse effects on cognitive functioning."

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