



## Risk Taking: Why do we take risks?

I recently read a story on daredevil Jeb Corliss' Flying Dagger jump – pretty wild. After jumping from a helicopter in a flying squirrel suit he threaded his way through a narrow fissure between two mountain peaks rising 2,677 feet at speeds of nearly 200 miles per hour.

This got me thinking: Why do we do stuff like this? What is it about risk taking that's so appealing? Are we chasing a feeling? Are some of us just born with a risky appetite? Why has this urge evolved? Why do some of us feel the need to be flying daggers while others are content to ride the pine and watch from the sidelines?



I did a bit of internet research, and determined that there are a number of factors that determine how much risk a person is willing to take. Here goes...

### **Chemistry**

Some scientists point to neurotransmitters levels in the brain to explain risk taking. The key chemical is dopamine, which is what gives you that 'rush feeling.' It can be very addictive, and after a while risk-takers need to push the envelope to get the same feeling they may have gotten earlier from a much safer stunt.

### **Perception**

If you perceive a certain behavior as risky, you are less likely to do it. If you are optimistic, you are also more likely to do it. Some people don't think the rules apply to them because they perceive a high level of control in crazy situations... even when they're flying through the after jumping out of a helicopter!

## **Pride / Gratification**

Taking risks and overcoming challenges can be very gratifying. This alone could be enough to tip the scales towards risky behavior.

*“I have been jumping for over 15 years and I have never done anything more committing and technical in my life. I am so happy” – Jeb Corliss, after his Flying Dagger jump.*

## **Gender**

In a general—but definitely not always—men are more inclined to be risk takers than women. Perhaps there are evolutionary reasons, or maybe it's chemical. Then again, maybe men just don't think things through the way women do!

## **Age**

Younger people take more risks, maybe because of hormone levels or just the fact that they have less life experience and less working knowledge of the consequences of their actions. That can be both a blessing and a curse.

## **Relationships**

People tend to seek less risks as they age and enter into stable relationships. Relationship status can actually be a strong predictor in risk-taking behavior. When a strong relationship ends, it often results in a person taking on more risks.

## **Desperation**

People are more likely to engage in risky behavior when they are desperate. If you or someone you love's life is on the line, there's probably not much you wouldn't do.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the many factors that come into play, there are definitely some patterns. An individual's inclination to take risks correlates with their level of perceived danger and the level of perceived benefit (pain vs. gain).

What's funny is that as life becomes more cushy in the 21st century, we keep on pushing the limits just to keep this threshold in balance. They invent the airbag, we invented Nascar. They invent the parachute, we jump out of planes in squirrel suits for fun. It seems crazy sometimes, why we take risks. Maybe it's essential, just a necessary part of life that keeps us moving forward and challenging ourselves to seek new heights, ensuring mankind's progression as a whole and bringing about our most remarkable successes most devastating failures...