

# PLAY IT AWAY



A WORKAHOLIC'S CURE FOR ANXIETY

**CHARLIE HOEHN**

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ISBN: 978-0-615-91817-4

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## MY ANXIETY STORY

For a long time, I thought I was going crazy. I'd convinced myself that something horribly wrong was about to happen. I thought I would be attacked or arrested every time I left my apartment.

I saw criminals and undercover cops everywhere I went. I was sure that there was an impending disaster that would melt the social contract and pit my neighbors against me. All that "world is coming to an end" talk? I believed it. And the only thing that made me feel safe was worrying.

Every moment was exhausting. I dreaded being around more than one person at a time. I eyed everyone like they were judging me, pitying me, or trying to manipulate me. My attention was constantly divided. One half of me pretended to be normal while the other half tried to keep it together. I could feel parts of my face twitching, like I was about to crack. My hands shook constantly. It got so bad that I couldn't drink a glass of water without spilling.

I tried to behave like nothing was wrong, when all I wanted was to lock myself in a room and curl up in a ball. I felt fragile, weak, and hollow. If someone had tapped me on the chest, my body would have shattered.

I didn't want to be around anyone – not because I stopped liking people; I just didn't want them to catch my weird energy. Everything felt forced and fake and exhausting. If someone experienced something great, I didn't care. If someone went through something horrible, I didn't care. If a friend wanted to go to the movies, I'd say, "Yeah, let's do that," but felt like they were trying to drain the little bit of life I had left.

I didn't have thoughts of *I want to kill myself*, but I did think *I want this to be done*. There was no meaning, purpose, joy, excitement, stimulation, or sex drive. I wearily watched my girlfriend cry after I confided that I felt dead inside, all the time, and didn't know how to fix it.

I was ashamed, because I couldn't explain it without feeling like a failure. How could I possibly be so miserable and unhappy? What right did I have to feel this way? Couldn't I just tough it out?

I laid on the ground in the fetal position for 20 minutes one night, wondering whether I should call an ambulance. My heart was beating so hard and fast that I could actually hear it, and my left hand was going numb. It was my first panic attack. I closed my eyes and trembled as two deafening thoughts played on loop in my mind:

*You are going crazy.*

*You are going to die.*

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*There's no 'I' in anxiety. Wait. Yes there is.  
Oh my god oh my god oh my god.*

— ELIZA BAYNE

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My anxiety lasted for more than a year. It affected how I breathed, how I thought, how I ate, how I slept, and how I talked. I was serious and tired and afraid, all the time. I wanted so badly to return to my normal, lively, carefree self. But I had no idea how to shake it.

I scheduled an appointment with my doctor. I told her about the panic attacks, and explained the inner turmoil I was battling. She suggested that I get an EKG at the hospital, just to make sure my heart was okay. Then she gave me a prescription for a pill she described as “a non-addictive version of Xanax.” She said it would help me sleep, and that I’d feel better in a few days.

I couldn’t believe it. I practically skipped home, clutching the little orange bottle to my chest. I finally had an escape hatch from my relentless tension and fear.

Just as I was about to take one of the pills, I decided to look up the brand on Wikipedia. My heart sunk as I read the warnings listed on the page:

*High addictive potential...*

*Withdrawal symptoms can range from anxiety and insomnia to seizures and psychosis...*

Great. Instead of suffering from anxiety, I can become a psychotic-epileptic-insomniac junkie...who *still* suffers from anxiety.

I read through dozens of blog posts and forum discussions about the drug. Nearly everyone said it stopped working after the first week. I couldn't find a single testimonial of this pill curing anyone's anxiety.

I took the little orange bottle to my bathroom and reluctantly flushed all 30 pills down the toilet.

I was extremely discouraged, but my desperation to cure myself was stronger than ever. I spent the next several months trying to conquer my inner demons. I researched and tried *everything*...

- |                            |                     |                           |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Meditation               | ✓ Acupuncture       | ✓ High-intensity workouts |
| ✓ Deep breathing exercises | ✓ Massages          | ✓ Long runs               |
| ✓ Yoga                     | ✓ Floatation tanks  | ✓ Super clean diets       |
| ✓ Journaling               | ✓ Chiropractors     | ✓ Supplements             |
| ✓ Therapy                  | ✓ Naturopaths       | ✓ Psychedelics            |
| ✓ Therapy books            | ✓ Spiritual healers | ✓ Extended fasting        |
| ✓ Aromatherapy             | ✓ Volunteering      | ✓ Prayer                  |

I even took a six-week course made specifically for men who wanted to overcome anxiety.

A few of these things helped, but most of them didn't. Some of them made things worse.

Then one day, it happened. I discovered the cure for my anxiety. It took me a moment to fully comprehend it, but when my mind processed that I'd found the solution, I started laughing. The answer had been so obvious all along.

In less than one month, I was back to my old self. I woke up one day and nearly overlooked how great I felt. My anxiety subsided so steadily that I no longer noticed it. Just like that, it was gone. I was free.

The process for healing myself was fun, painless, and immediately effective. I have no fear that those awful feelings will ever return. If they do, I'll be able to wipe them out right away.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If you'd like to watch a quick video summary of my cure and the contents of this book, visit [playitaway.me/video](https://playitaway.me/video).



## WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

In May of 2013, I wrote a lengthy essay called *How I Cured My Anxiety* and published it on my blog, CharlieHoehn.com. I didn't have a huge audience, but I suspected the message would strike a chord with my readers. It did.

Within two weeks, the post was read and shared by tens of thousands of people. I received hundreds of messages from anxiety sufferers all over the world. The post was so popular that it shot up to the #1 position on Google for the search phrase "cure anxiety" – right above Oprah.com.

My post was honest, but it was incomplete. It didn't contain everything that helped me; only my first major breakthrough. I wanted to share all of the techniques that put my life back on track and healed my pain. That's the book you're reading right now.

I wrote *Play It Away* because I couldn't find anything like it when I was searching for my cure. That's the point of this book: to create for other people what I wished had existed. I was so jaded after trying all these different things that never seemed to help. Then a few key pieces clicked into place, and I was back to normal. And

at the risk of sounding like a late-night infomercial, the cure for my anxiety was so much easier than I imagined.

It's my sincerest hope that, by sharing my entire story, you too will find your way back to health and happiness. But before we continue, I need to lay down a quick disclaimer. Just so there's no confusion, please understand:

**I am not a health care professional**, and while a lot of these chapters contain actionable advice that you can use in your life, **this book is about MY experiences curing MY anxiety**. What I did might work for you, or it might not. You need to figure that out for yourself by using your own judgment, not just by blindly following my advice (or anyone's advice, really).<sup>2</sup>

In order to properly treat anxiety, one must identify and fix what is causing it. The primary source of my anxiety was me. I was the creator of my own suffering. I just couldn't see it.

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<sup>2</sup> The methods I used to heal my anxiety are backed up by a lot of data and scientific research. I won't weigh you down with those details in the text because that's not what this book is about. However, if you want to double-check the validity of any of my techniques, just visit [playitaway.me/endnotes](http://playitaway.me/endnotes).

## MY WORKAHOLIC STORY

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*If you work for a living,  
why do you kill yourself working?*

— THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY

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My brain felt swollen, like it was pushing against my skull. I looked down at my iPhone. Good lord. 60 hours straight. Wide awake, no sleep, for *60 hours straight*. Yet I was still lively and sharp, thanks to the magic pill.

For four days, I'd supercharged my energy with a powerful nootropic; a brain drug typically reserved for fighter pilots and narcoleptics. If you've seen the movie *Limitless*, well, that pill actually exists. The drug's primary function is to silence the body's pleas for sleep. Lucky for me. Rest was a luxury I couldn't afford.

I'd secretly taken this brain drug, without my boss knowing, so I could be great at my job. I was in charge of coordinating the *Opening the Kimono* event — a private conference on next-generation content marketing, hosted by Tim Ferriss.

Most people knew Tim as the author of two mega-bestselling books: *The 4-Hour Workweek* and *The 4-Hour Body*. The driving themes of Tim's work were effectiveness and efficiency — getting better results, in less time, with less effort. In *The 4HWW*, Tim gave readers step-by-step blueprints for creating online businesses, generating passive income, outsourcing work, and taking mini-retirements. In *The 4HB*, Tim revealed how to lose 20 pounds of fat in one month (without exercise), how to triple fat loss with cold exposure, and how to produce 15-minute female orgasms. Both books sold more than a million copies each, and Tim was a star in the publishing world.

In addition to being a bestselling author, Tim was also a successful angel investor and advisor (his portfolio included Facebook, Twitter, Uber, Evernote, and many others). He was also — and I'm not exaggerating — a Chinese kickboxing champion, a horseback archer, a world record holder in tango, and a polyglot (fluent in five languages). The man was the embodiment of achievement, and I was lucky enough to have him as my mentor.

I'd been working with Tim for nearly three years as his Director of Special Projects. It was a dream job I'd worked hard to land, and I'd reaped countless benefits. In the time we'd known each other, he'd personally introduced me to his entire network of successful friends, given me a world-class education in entrepreneurship, and helped build my portfolio into an expansive showcase of incredible work.

I was 25 years old at the time, living in Russian Hill in San Francisco. Each morning, I'd walk over to my neighborhood café, sit down with my laptop, and work until nightfall on my weekly tasks. Whenever I finished a given job, I'd

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*Thanks for reading!*



*Charlie*

The pills arrived just before the event. I took one every morning. Each day, I expected to pass out randomly from exhaustion. But it never happened; I stayed alert and wide-awake the whole time. The pills really, really worked. During the course of the four-day seminar, I slept a grand total of *six hours*. And just as I'd hoped, I was great at my job.

The event was a whirlwind, but we managed to pull it off. On the final day, everyone gave us a standing ovation. Attendees ran up to hug us and said it was the best conference they'd ever been to. Our inboxes were filled with dozens of glowing reviews and thank you notes.

After months of working around the clock, we'd exhausted ourselves. Tim gave me a hearty congratulatory hug, and I gave him one in return. We were both exhausted, but we'd done it.