

A beating heart, sweaty palms, and your mind fixed on a regular circle of negative feelings—far too much of us understand the symptoms of anxiety. However, what can you do when your anxiety gets really terrible that your entire life crumbles? Also, how can you help yourself improve?

As you'll find out in this book chapter, the answer can be as easy as jogging.

Both a searingly personal biography and a primer on mental health, these book chapters examine the health issues that pushed journalist Bella Mackie to the edge of misery – and how a simple workout regime pulled her back from the brink. Filled with disturbing understandings, scientific research, as well as inspirational stories, this book is a call to action to become fit and begin living once again.

## Chapter 1 - For the most part of Bella Mackie's life, she struggled with mental health issues.

Bella Mackie had just been married for only eight months when her husband left her. After he abandoned her, Bella lay on the floor, completely heartbroken. She was aware that she would need to get up sooner or later and handle this trauma –similar to anybody after a failed relationship. However, the issue was, Bella wasn't like every other person.

Even while Bella was still a young child, she was very anxious. Everything scared her – from surreal pieces of art to specific songs to the noises generated from cars. Her stomach, as well as her chest, usually hurt with worry. When she attended school parties, she would get a strong sense of fear; something would just feel wrong.

Bella had strange behaviors when she started high school. Anytime she had a dreadful feeling, she would blink, swallow, or spit on the ground to attempt and get rid of it. Also, she would harm herself. She didn't just pick her skin until she drew blood; however, she pulled her hair out as well— a condition called trichotillomania. Even now as an adult, she has marks on her legs as a result of pulling out her hair.

She did this whole thing to try and handle her extreme anxiety. However, unsurprisingly, these coping methods were not effective. Rather, things got worse. She began going through disassociation – a frightening symptom of anxiety that makes sufferers feel disconnected from their environments.

When Bella felt disassociation, the world around her seemed badly distorted. Colors looked garish, and it felt as though there was a layer of bubble wrap between her and reality. At times, when the disassociation was very bad, she couldn't identify her own face when she looks into the mirror. The condition made everything look planned and unreal– as though her family and friends were actors in a film.

When Bella became a teenager, she started having panic attacks as well.

In an effort to feel safe, she began evading areas that made her panic. However, as the years went by, this signified she couldn't go to most of the city where she stayed, or go to her local stores, or even go to the closest park near her. When she became married, Bella was dodging from everything –such as planes, freeways, elevators, and subway.

In the following chapter, we'll examine the illnesses that were driving Bella's isolation more.

## Chapter 2 - As Bella discovered, anxiety disorders are severe disorders that have both mental and physical symptoms.

What does it feel like when someone has anxiety? If you haven't felt it yourself, you might assume that you have a really good understanding. When Bella mentioned about her mental health issues to people, they would usually say, "I completely understand, I'm a worrier as well!" These people really meant well; however, they really had small knowledge of how devastating anxiety can be.

Therefore, what does it actually mean to suffer from anxiety?

Let's begin by examining Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, also called OCD. This anxiety disorder is usually related to keeping things excessively neat. However, this disastrous condition doesn't really have anything to do with ensuring that your belongings are very well aligned.

As a matter of fact, OCD begins with worrying thoughts. A mother that has OCD might unexpectedly reason, "What if I killed my daughter?" Now, though thoughts such as these are alarming, they are not abnormal. As a matter of fact, various studies reveal that every one of us experiences random negative feelings such as this occasionally.

The difference is how we handle them. A person that doesn't have OCD will just think, "Wow, that was a strange thought" and carry on to thinking about another thing. However, for a person suffering from OCD, the troubling thought gets stuck in her mind. She will use hours stressing about if she truly could hurt her child.

At times, the sufferer develops compulsive behaviors as well—thinking that these behaviors are the only means to stop bad thoughts from becoming a reality. Bella used to think that the only means to stop her mom from dying was to switch off light switches in a certain manner. This made Bella use hours turning lights on and off until she sensed she had done it properly.

A different anxiety condition that has scary effects for the sufferer is Panic disorder. This disorder links to the fight or flight response – activated when your body senses an immediate danger. When this occurs, adrenaline is released into your bloodstream, which accelerates your reaction time and makes you more powerful and faster.

However, panic disorder activates this adrenaline reaction at the wrong periods. Bella could be on a bus or in a supermarket when her body would begin conveying signals that she was under extreme danger. When this occurs, sufferers begin feeling breathless and shaky, which brings about more feelings of fear and panic. In Bella's situation, at times, she felt as though she was close to dying during a particularly bad panic attack.

**Chapter 3 - Bella chose to stop avoiding her issues and only run instead.**

Let's go back to the story of Bella. During the time her marriage came to an end, Bella was choking in her narrow cage of anxiety. She didn't have any confidence, no independence, and now there was no husband. It looked as if like couldn't become much worse. However, there was a silver lining: the breakup was painful; however, the break up also made her rethink her life.

After a couple of days of crying and drinking lots of wine, she chose to do a different thing. Rather than using the evening slumped in front of the television, she decided to go for a jog. She still doesn't actually understand how she came to this choice— it only seemed like the appropriate thing to do.

She was very nervous to visit a gym or a park; therefore, she discovered a private alleyway near her home instead. She simply succeeded to run for just three minutes that evening she started, and she did more of walking in between. However, later on; she discovered something extraordinary: she hadn't cried for a complete quarter of an hour.

Bella began going back to that alleyway each night to practice jogging. Initially, her runs were short, slow, and completely tiring. Still, she continued. Two weeks after, she discovered the confidence to leave the alley and began running on the streets near her home.

She had an insight during those early jogs. Whenever she ran, she became less sad, and her mind got quieter. For those few minutes of physical workout, she wasn't thinking about her divorce or her husband dating other people. As a matter of fact, she wasn't thinking about it that much at all. After years of her brain tying itself up in knots with frightening, intrusive feelings, this quietness was a big relief.

Also, it wasn't only her bad feelings that were vanishing— her panic attacks were disappearing as well.

Shortly, Bella started jogging through busy markets and jam-packed streets —areas she'd used years dodging from. If she'd been walking, these places would have activated the conversant feelings of doom and fear. However, miraculously, whenever she ran through them she felt okay. There was no longer space in her mind for panic. Rather, she concentrated on her feet hitting the sidewalk, on the people she needed to avoid hitting, and the pain in her legs.

Bella's anxiety was in control anymore. And it felt good.

## Chapter 4 - Running assisted Bella to feel better – and running can do the exact same thing for you too.

Six years after her divorce, Bella runs for a minimum of one hour each morning. This might seem like a chore; however, Bella strongly believes that this basic workout routine has saved her life. Her panic attacks didn't just vanish; however, she's also happier and more confident. She's even remarried again.

When she discusses how jogging transformed her life, some individuals are cynical. Some people mention that she might have gotten better notwithstanding. However, science claims that workout does have an actual and useful effect on mental health.

Hence, what is the reason why exercise really good for the mind?

Well, it has more to do with a hormone known as cortisol. Cortisol is a stress hormone you're your body produces when its fight or flight response is activated. Scientists have discovered that when you workout, your cortisol levels reduce, making you feel less stressed later.

Also, exercise motivates anxiety sufferers to ponder on their symptoms differently. This is effective since the impacts of exercise on the body are really very related to the physical symptoms of anxiety. In both circumstances, you feel a racing heart, extreme sweating, and gushes of adrenaline. This entails that, when a person that is anxious embraces an exercise regime, he starts to have positive connections with these feelings. Afterward, when he feels anxiety symptoms, he'll be less afraid of them and won't panic that much.

Bella has experienced this advantage for herself. Before she began working out, she would read a beating heart and breathlessness as an indication that she was having a heart attack. Also, in a few seconds, she'd see herself in the middle of a full-blown panic attack. However, after feelings these exact same sensations when jogging, they didn't fill her with fear anymore.

Together with the hormonal as well as cognitive advantages, there's also proof that exercise transforms us on a much deeper, neurological level. A current study examined mice that lived in a stressful surrounding. So, some of these mice were permitted to exercise regularly, whereas the other mice were not allowed to exercise at all. Later, the researchers found out that, the active stressed mice had formed new connections in their hippocampus – the part of the brain in charge of emotions.

However, the sedentary group hadn't formed these connections. This shows that, at a neurological level, exercise prepares us to deal with stress better. It definitely assisted Bella.

## Chapter 5 - Working out in nature offers your mental health an additional boost –a thing Bella personally felt.

Any amount of workout is great for your health, maybe you're putting in miles on a treadmill or just running around the block. However, in order to maximize the advantages of working up a sweat, attempt to go outside your everyday environment, and go for more natural surroundings instead.

Think of current research from Stanford University, whereby some participants took a long nature walk, whereas the other participants strolled through an urban surrounding. The researchers discovered that the participants who walked in nature used less time thinking about their sad or negative thoughts.

Not just that, when the participants from the nature group went through brain scans; however, they were also seen to have less activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex – the area of the brain that's connected to poor mental health. But, these results weren't noticed in the group of participants who walked in an urban environment.

These results are supported by other current research, which has found out that physical activities that are done in nature –such as horseback riding and cycling –make people feel less depressed and angry.

However, what can be done if you stay in a city or town? Don't stress—various studies have revealed that you don't constantly have to work out in nature to get the advantages of it. Extraordinarily, research done by the University of Essex has discovered that just viewing images of lush, natural landscapes while you work out is sufficient to increase your self-esteem and decrease your blood pressure!

Now that she knows of these entire advantages, Bella attempts to run in nature as much as possible as she can. On one occasion, after a bad week where a close friend of hers had passed away, Bella jogged along the beautiful Irish coastline. Hit by the wind and seagulls for company, her morbid feelings of grief disappeared from her mind.

All of a sudden, she didn't just see alone; however, she also felt the beauty of her environments—the sea, the waves, a mountain. While running, she felt little but not unimportant. She understood that she was connected to the natural world, even though her place in it was tiny. As she paused to pay attention to the waves and feel the sun on her face, she was not thinking about the past or stressing about the future. Rather, she was eventually living in the here and now.

## Chapter 6 - A lot of us don't get an adequate workout and the reasons why are difficult.

Since starting her exercise path, Bella has had a discussion with a lot of people for whom running has made a huge difference—such as Sara, a young mother who discovered that jogging relieved her postnatal depression. Sara had been self-harming in an attempt to feel something again after delivering after her baby. However, running offered Sara a healthier method to do this. Nowadays, the only pain Sara inflicts on herself comprises jogging on an icy winter's day or accepting the burn after an extreme workout session. According to her, running is worth it.

The stories of Bella and Sara's are inspirational; however, they bring about a disturbing question as well: If running is really great, then what is the reason why more of us aren't doing it?

It's a sad reality that 26% of the entire adults in England do lesser than 30 minutes of exercise per week. Also, the data reveal that women work out less than men. The cause for this gender imbalance may be seen in the preconceived notions we have about working out. Research has revealed that a lot of women and girls see sports as competitive, aggressive, and incompatible with being feminine.

Frequently, this female reluctance to sports begins young; a lot of teenage girls state feeling uncomfortable during mixed-gender gym sessions. One of the reasons is as a result of the comments that boys make during these classes. Sadly, these feelings of discomfort go with women into adulthood. When Cosmopolitan magazine conducted a survey, they discovered that most women felt threatened by gyms and that some were afraid of being criticized by men.

These dreads around workout are frequently increased for women from ethnic minority settings. Black and Asian women in the UK do lesser sports compared to their white counterparts. A study discovered that South Asian women concerned about experiencing racism in group workout classes, whereas Muslim women were nervous that they would need to work out in groups with men there.

As we can notice, not the entire obstacles that hinder people from running can be stopped by just willpower. Some of them need institutions as well as policymakers to think of how workout can be made accessible to everyone.

However, if you're a person who's constantly avoided jogging, bear in mind that it's never really late to begin. As a matter of fact, Fauja Singh, who was the oldest marathon runner in the world, just started training during his eighties. Therefore, anytime you're willing and able, jogging will still be around for you. Good luck!

## Jog On: How Running Saved My Life by Bella Mackie Book Review

There is no magical remedy for anxiety. There's no medication you can use or work out you can do that will ensure that you never feel bothered or unhappy again. However, a running regime

can assist you to cope with your symptoms and offer you the tools to live a more satisfying life. Therefore, tie your sneakers lace, and let go of your anxiety by allowing your body to fly down a – preferably nature-filled – path.

Don't do a lot too fast.

When you begin running, it can be very easy for you to do too much. You may be filled with lots of enthusiasm and push yourself to run faster and more, right out of the gate. However, going hard at the start can bring about injury or tiredness– and can make you stop running completely. A better way to do that is to begin slowly, making by making use of a 5k running app that assists you to grow to longer distances over a period of weeks. But, you do it, just bear in mind that to cover long distances in the future, you most likely have to begin small now.

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