

Were you to find yourself not being unable to grasp the world around you anymore, what would be the thing you'd do? If the fabric of your mind looked as if it was unwinding, and you could all of a sudden no longer think?

When he was about twenty-year-old, when struck by a too acute panic attack that made it impossible for him to go out of the house, Matt Haig needed to deal with exactly these questions. The solutions he found are not only inspired but also inspiring. Instead of staying away from what makes him stressful, or taking drugs or other soothing medicaments to ease his fear, he let himself feel he was complete, which had never happened in his life before.

This summary recounts the way Haig created a technique of challenging fear with fear and declined to make himself stay in his comfort zone. You are going to find out the way books helped him like a lifeline, being a friend for him if he was feeling very lonely and providing him with a language to comprehend what he went through.

## Chapter 1 - Matt Haig abruptly started to feel severe anxiety, and it impacted each point of his life.

It was a warm bright day in Ibiza, Spain when Matt Haig felt a charge of such a severe panic that he wasn't able to move out of bed. This happened at his 24 and he was staying in a nice villa with his girlfriend and had a job at a nightclub during the summer.

Until the panic moment hit, he was consuming too much alcohol and occasionally felt anxious contemplating what he will do in life, however, he wasn't still especially depressed. Later, the panic started to occur.

In three consecutive days, Haig was unable to sleep and he couldn't leave his bed. The panic never eased and was cruel. His heartbeat was such that he thought he would definitely pass away.

At one level, it became impossible to fight with panic, and Haig earnestly contemplated suicide. He went as far as to stand at the point of a cliff around the villa, wanting to leap off the cliff. However, he couldn't as he believed his loved ones couldn't handle losing him.

His sweetheart, Andrea, was, naturally, very concerned. She wanted him to see a doctor, who gave him some drugs to soothe his anxiety. Those drugs didn't much work on him, however, still they numbed Haig's feelings sufficiently long to make him go back to Great Britain, to his worried-parents' side.

If one saw their life in Great Britain from outside, it may have looked like a serene one. Haig was hanging around home, looking at the news, preparing some food. However, what crossed his mind was nowhere near serene. A severe mixture of depression and anxiety had terribly taken him into their palms. The depression was giving him gloomy thoughts, causing him to see himself useless and futureless and the anxiety engulfed him with never-ending panic.

Going just to the nearby store turned into a huge problem. Haig would defer purchasing a simple product like milk and begin to breathe abruptly and heavily shortly after he goes out of the house. He started to suffer from hallucinations where devils were bothering him, or that made him think that an awful was soon to occur.

When he is in the shop, his anxiety would aggravate. Shelves full of products with shiny labels would engulf him so much that it would become almost impossible to locate the milk. Once he eventually locates the milk, he was now supposed to experience social interaction with the cashier, striving hopelessly to look normal.

## Chapter 2 - Before everything came to that stage, there had been alerts, indicating a breakdown was about to hit.

Is it possible for severe anxiety and depression truly occur as if lightning hits the ground? Apparently, this sort of thing happened to Haig. The sudden start of what he calls “breakdown” was frightening. The breakdown made him feel as if something had turned off in his brain, causing an abrupt failure in his brain. But, when he tracked his past, he was able to realize that the anxiety began prior to the panic attacks that struck him in Ibiza.

In his recollections, the first time he had a feeling of anxiety was when he was ten-year-old. He detested it whenever his parents would go out at night, and he is still able to remember staying in the house as a kid, waiting for their arrival, startling that the most terrible would happen to them. Had he lost his parents in an accident? Or had they been attacked by stray dogs?

This separation anxiety started to grow when he was a teen. At the age of 13, for example, he participated in a school camp and was supposed to sleep in a barn together with the other male pupils in his class. He got so anxious that, while completely asleep, he started shouting and later sleepwalked to a window and hit his arm into the glass.

He was still anxious when he was at university, too. But he alleviated its effect with alcohol. However, even several strong spirits couldn't smother the panic he felt during a merely one-third-of-an-hour long presentation on cubism for an art history class he was taking. Even thinking about giving a speech in public was enough to drive him to breathe heavily and abruptly, however, he could do nothing to change this. He concealed himself in the toilet by the time the course started and then pushed himself to get through his notes. The extreme pressure caused something very serious. It was the first time that he felt derealization: he began to feel totally disconnected from his body, as if he was an outsider, watching in.

Surely, it becomes more straightforward to notice alerts when we track the past. Back then, these things didn't come as unnatural to Haig. In a sense, there isn't anything wrong with them, too. All of us went through the anxiety sometimes. However, what is the stage where the anxiety evolves to a full-blown breakdown? Haig thinks that his anxiety aggravated since he strived so hard to restrain it. He hopelessly wanted to become like the people around him;

thus; he attempted to keep his severe anxiety in check, or consume alcohol to make it vanish.

## Chapter 3 - There is no precise information regarding the reasons behind anxiety and depression, and we cannot find a universal cure.

Medicine today has developed medicines for diseases that, prior to only several decades, were thought impossible to eradicate. HIV isn't any more a death certificate today, and women no longer have to be afraid of giving birth. We've got accustomed to developing scientific solutions to all our issues.

Sadly, scientific studies cannot produce as much certain solution depression as they have produced for other diseases. What does it follow from? What's the way of solving it? We cannot find absolute responses to these questions. What's more, there are many theories that are in disaccord with each other.

For very long, scientists have thought that depression stemmed from a chemical irregularity in the brain. Particularly people who suffer from depression don't have as high serotonin levels as a normal individual has. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter considered by scientists to regulate mood. That hypothesis has played a role in the development of a six-billion-dollar worth pharmaceutical sector.

However, this isn't that simple. Though pharmaceutical medications do benefit millions of people, there are also lots of people who don't feel any change after taking them. Or who have received positive outcomes from medications that affect totally various brain chemicals?

Some researches also think that chemical levels don't affect depression. They assert that depression follows from a failure in nucleus accumbens – the minuscule field in the middle of your brain that scientists believe its task is about pleasure and addiction.

The entirety of these theories has faced criticism for treating brains as if they are not part of the human body. However, we just need to examine several of the symptoms of depression and anxiety to see that we cannot think of them separately. Most of Haig's symptoms affected severely his body. Anxiety showed itself as prickling sensations everywhere on his body and as heavy and abrupt breathing. Depression felt like corporal anguish pressurized massively in his chest.

One other thing to keep in mind is that our bodies don't come into existence in a void. What evolutionary psychologist Jonathan Rottenberg says is that our social circles impact our mental well-being as much as our brain chemistry.

The reason why we mentioned all these is to point out that comprehending the reasons behind depression is very complicated. We are unable to find a universal solution for it. Unfortunately, it's not possible to find a drug that'll help with depression. However, it's possible to save yourself from it, just as the author did. However, for starters, you'll need to acknowledge the natural complicatedness of depression and obtain things that'll help you.

## Chapter 4 - People who've got depression, and particularly men, experience social isolation.

When you break your limb, you'll get your leg stiffened with a bandage and be given crutches. People can instantly notice that you went through some kind of an accident and will usually try to aid you. People who don't know you will leave their seats on the bus for you. Friends will provide you with groceries to your home. It's not simple. However, at least people are cognizant of how to take care of you with caution.

Apart from being difficult to treat, depression and anxiety aren't visible. Haig could be going through an awful panic attack, however, an outsider would only think he was a bit sluggish or absent-minded. Someone who's highly observant perhaps could see that Haig's pupils became bigger, however, the person would never know the things that had him in their grip.

On one of the days when he felt terribly bad, Haig started crying in his parent's bedroom. His father entered the room and gave him a hug. Haig felt relieved for a while. Later, his father told him to snap out of it.

His father only wanted to assist him. He just wanted his son to recuperate. However, telling him to snap out of it was demanding the unachievable. Haig sensed as if his mind had dissolved. He had no adequate power to expel that feeling. He was lacking people who would let him manifest how awful he was feeling and underpin him, instead of asking him to pull himself together.

That men don't get much chance to open up their feelings can lead to life-threatening ends. Despite the fact that women suffer from depression twice as much as men, men are a lot more prone to suicide. In Great Britain, men commit suicide three times more than women do. In Greece, for every six men who commit suicide, there is one woman.

These statistics are frightening. It appears that most men think that there is no other thing they can do except suicide. According to Haig, it will stay the same unless we learn how to openly discuss depression. It was only ten years later that Haig managed to openly discuss his depression. However, the only person he could frankly discuss this with was Andrea, whom he deems as the savior of his life.

Talking about depression and anxiety should not be any different than talking about an injured leg. People should see it as something normal, not something people should feel disgrace. As a problem that anyone can suffer from it, and don't need to tell anything regarding their identity. And as something that has to be taken care of and needs support.

## Chapter 5 - Books provided Haig the escape when he was in a difficult position as they presented him with language to comprehend what he was going through.

Suppose that you want to share something with a close friend. You start moving your tongue and make sounds that create words, however, your friend cannot comprehend what you say. You keep trying, however it makes you feel as if what you're talking is nonsense, and your friend just looks at you, not understanding you.

This was the situation of Haig when the breakdown struck. It seemed downright impossible for him to share his feelings with his parents and friends. Haig's and others' points of view differed so much that Haig says he felt as if he was delineating what earth looks like to extra-terrestrial creatures. However, since he was unable to tell himself what he was going through, the situation worsened. Both depression and anxiety clung onto him so tightly that he no more had a perspective on what he was going through.

While he was at his lowest point, experiencing agony, he discovered a lifeline which one would regard as unlikely: books. Books are usually viewed as a sort of escapism, however, for Matt Haig, it was vice versa. Books provided him an opportunity to discover himself again.

Reading Holden Caulfield's satiric cynicism in *The Catcher in the Rye*, or Albert Camus's isolated character in *The Outsider*, he felt less lonely as never happened before. He was able to see that the writers knew how an experience this was to be alienated from society and to go through anguish.

Literary language may sound strange. Writers employ poetic words to talk about the world in emotion-intense words. However, thanks to this language Haig could understand what he was going through. Well, he never perceived the world as the "normal" people perceived it. The poetic language gave a tool of explaining to himself what he was going through.

Books let him have a sense of purpose as well. While Haig was no longer able to understand what was going on in his life, the protagonists in the books he read had action-filled, moving lives. The protagonists went to remote lands; they took part in wars. In his lowest times, Haig was feeling like there was no future for him, however, it was easing the distress of him when he was reading about protagonists who had a future.

It was not until fourteen years passed after his breakdown that Haig could explain anxiety and depression he had been going through. Haig's book is today something that people can find help and the book proves there is always a future, but you might be unable to see it when you experience depression and anxiety.

## Chapter 6 - The author's recuperation began when he confronted his fears.

Several months later when his breakdown struck, Haig would be awake in his bed and think purposeless about what the next day would bring. Then he began to come to realize with a shock that his thought was not linked to anxiety. This thought was neither positive nor negative. He had never felt calm like this until that moment. After several days, he started to go outside to feel the sun on his face. This feeling was a new experience, as well: it was very long ago when he enjoyed such pleasures. These intervals of calm provided him with hope. These were like tiny but assuring indications that the things could evolve to better.

However, those intervals of calm didn't happen so much, and Haig's hope quickly vanished and was replaced with gloomier thoughts. He always fretted that his depression and anxiety was an indication of losing his mind. This phenomenon is known as meta anxiety, which simply means worrying about worrying. It is possible that meta anxiety causes people to be stuck in a vicious cycle where anxiety produces anxiety. This was precisely what happened to Haig until he came up with a solution to employ it to assist his recuperation.

Haig feared a lot that he would be alone at home, going outside the house, or mingling with others. Slowly, his world had shrunk more and more. Roughly four years later when his breakdown first struck, Andrea, his girlfriend, made him a surprise by arranging an impromptu trip to Paris for his birthday. He was terrified of this plan. It was already very difficult for him to go out to the street without experiencing a panic attack, let alone go to a foreign country.

However, then he began to contemplate what the indication of not going to Paris would be. A frightened voice in his mind said to him that unless he went there he truly would turn into – the word felt inescapable – “crazy” person. Thus, fighting his fear of public areas with his fear of mental breakdown, he determined to go to Paris. Though he was very worried all the time they were in Paris, he didn't experience a panic attack. He managed to handle it better than he believed he could. Furthermore, being in a different place provided him with a different approach to his life. In the truest sense of the word, his world became bigger and enabled him to regard his own thinking processes a bit less earnestly.

By combatting his fears, Haig managed to gradually see that what he held true didn't have to be true. He could act oddly in a shop and it wouldn't mean the apocalypse. He might have gone through a panic attack on the train and could share it as a story. His resilience was much stronger than his depressed and anxious had made him think the opposite.

## Chapter 7 - If you've got anxiety and depression, you can get more insightful and empathetic.

You might feel astounded to learn that Abraham Lincoln also went through depression. Winston Churchill suffered from this as well. Each of them was incredibly aspiring and had

remarkable professional lives. They did all these things while going through anxiety and depression for most of their lives.

Though people occasionally mention these leaders managed to accomplish many things despite their depression, we can put it differently. Maybe they owed their accomplishments to their anxiety and depression.

Perhaps this sounds odd since we've discussed for pages how depression can render you immobile and best your brain with dark thoughts. Why would it play a role in running a country?

After all, depression renders you very much conscious of how bitter life may be. Maybe the profound compassion that made Lincoln become aware of the inhumanity embedded in slavery stemmed from the fact that he went through depressive breakdowns. Winston Churchill had been among the earliest European leaders to sense how threatening a regime the Nazi party would evolve into. His familiar experience of the shadier aspects of life probably provided him with a sensitive insight that other leaders didn't have.

When you go through depression and anxiety, it becomes more possible for you to be deeply present to the world surrounding you. This goes not only for politicians but also for most venerable authors who used their perceptive comprehension of the world in art. And we wouldn't be able to see Edvard Munch's renowned work *The Scream* today unless Munch hadn't gone through a panic attack when he strolling at sunset.

Haig had constantly combated his own intensity. He detested that he became very sensitive since it was easy to break into tears for him. However, following his breakdown, he gradually started to adopt being sensitive. The process was engulfing, however, this was the thing that made it possible for him to be an author. And aside from his career, this also made him relish his life so fully today.

Being sensitive means that his feelings were closer to him. When he experienced the breakdown, he mostly felt gloomy, however, his feelings can be very positive, too. Those feelings have him feel profound happiness at being together with his children. Or cry in appreciation while reading a well-written book.

Having gone through depression and anxiety means that he appreciates every piece of his life – be it the good or the bad, the dark nor the light.

## Chapter 8 - The process of recuperation from depression doesn't always follow an upward trending line.

Many usually consider recuperation as a process similar to a line non-stoppingly moving upwards. They think people move gradually upward from mental suffering to a healthy condition, and no longer have any issues.”



What actually happens is much more complicated. Fourteen years later when Haig experienced the breakdown in Ibiza, he has ceased to wait for a thorough recuperation. Haig came to realize his moods will never be stable and that the constant feeling of good isn't probable. Today, he is cognizant that anxious moments won't last eternally and that it is possible to live life fully and relish it more than he would have thought when he was suffering from the breakdown.

Rather than searching for a magic remedy, Haig has created a group of daily means so that he can feel better. Several of them are quite easy, such as a healthy diet and sleeping enough and putting on neat clothes.

He is aware that if he looks after his body carefully, he starts feeling well. Thus, he goes jogging, running along the pavement daily. When he is done with his long run, Haig will feel exhausted and sweaty and much more comfortable than when he began.

In order to gear down his worried brain, he began doing yoga and meditation. As one can expect, decelerating his actions and breath helps him calm his rushing thoughts, too.

Moreover, Haig put a threshold on himself with regard to the time he spends on such social media as Facebook and Twitter. Rather, he makes efforts to allocate more time to hang out with his beloved people, with Andrea, who is his wife today, and their two kids.

Furthermore, he continues to enjoy his most favorite addiction of all: reading. Reading and trips make him leave his own mind and into another's, a talent that he uses in his writing.

Maybe the most significant thing is that he isn't impatient with himself. After having experienced a panic attack at a gathering where there are great authors and running away, Haig didn't kill much time thinking about it. Rather, he was happy that he was brave enough to participate in the gathering, an achievement that would have sounded unimaginable just a few years ago.

Though his depression has no single medicine to eliminate the illness for good, Haig has developed ways that facilitate coping with depression and a lot of reasons to continue to live his life.

## Reasons to Stay Alive by Matt Haig Book Review

If anxiety and depression beset you, your perception of the world becomes distorted. You feel as though you would never relish life anymore, as though there was no future for you. However, this is unrealistic. Over time, it'll be possible to recover your sense of perspective and create means to begin to feel more normal. The experience of depression and anxiety will provide you with improved sensitivity to the world. You might be engulfed by this, however, you can relish it, too.

Identify whatever makes you feel better.



What fills you with positive feelings or bad one is as peculiar to you as your fingerprints are. One person can find peace in dancing in the middle of a mosh pit. Another person can find peace through a bout of silent meditation. Write down whatever raises your mood, and try doing at least one of them daily.

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