

Living Beyond Health Anxiety

My Journey, My Lessons & Practical Tools

“Anxiety doesn’t define you. You can live beyond it.”

My Journey

In 2021, during the COVID second wave, I experienced my first full-blown panic attack. What started as chest tightness and breathlessness ended in the ER, only to learn my tests were normal. Over time, I developed health anxiety — Googling every symptom, rushing to ERs, and avoiding daily life. Through therapy, CBT techniques, and personal motivation — especially my son — I gradually regained control.

What is Health Anxiety?

Health anxiety happens when your brain’s alarm system gets stuck in ON mode. Normal sensations feel dangerous, and thoughts spiral to worst-case scenarios.

Situation	Normal Thought	Health Anxiety Thought
Mild chest pain	“Maybe I lifted something heavy.”	“I’m having a heart attack!”
Headache	“I need some rest.”	“It’s probably a brain tumor.”
Muscle twitch	“I must be dehydrated.”	“Could this be a nerve disease?”

Think of your brain like a smoke detector. For most people, the alarm rings only when there’s a real fire. With health anxiety, the alarm goes off even when you just make toast. ■■

The Health Anxiety Cycle

Trigger	Normal sensation (e.g., chest tightness)
Catastrophic Thought	“Something’s wrong!”
Panic	Physical symptoms intensify
Reassurance	ER visits, tests, or Googling
Temporary Relief	Calm until the next trigger

CBT Tools That Helped Me

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helped me identify, challenge, and reframe my anxious thoughts.

Situation	Automatic Thought	Feeling (0-10)	Rational Thought
Chest tightness	“Heart attack!”	9	“Happened before, likely anxiety.”

Grounding Technique (5-4-3-2-1): • 5 things you can see • 4 things you can touch • 3 things you can hear • 2 things you can smell • 1 thing you're grateful for

Guided Box Breathing

A simple but powerful technique to calm your nervous system: • Inhale for 4 seconds • Hold for 4 seconds • Exhale for 6 seconds • Pause for 2 seconds

“Use this anytime, anywhere — your instant reset button.”

My Top 5 Lessons

- Anxiety is a condition, not a disease.
- Googling symptoms fuels fear.
- Therapy works when you commit fully.
- CBT rewires thought patterns.
- Consistency beats intensity — small steps matter most.

Gratitude & Hope

To my wife — for your patience, love, and silent strength. To my son — for giving me the courage to fight and live again. To my friends — for understanding, supporting, and pulling me back into life. To my organization — for creating a safe, supportive environment where I could heal.

“Anxiety may walk beside you, but it doesn't have to lead your life.”