

How I Fought Back Against Health Anxiety

Hello everyone. I want to talk to you about something real. Something that changed my life forever.

Like many of you... COVID flipped my world upside down.

It was 2021. Second wave. One evening, I suddenly felt breathless... my chest tightened... I thought, "This is it. Heart attack." I rushed to the ER, terrified. I even called everyone I knew in the middle of the night, begging to find a hospital bed. But the scan? It came back normal. What I had experienced... was a panic attack.

That night was the beginning of my health anxiety journey.

Now let me pause here and explain something that took me months to understand.

What is anxiety? Anxiety is not just "overthinking." It's your body's natural response to fear. It's like your internal alarm system. You feel unsafe — and your brain triggers fight or flight. Your heart races. You sweat. Your breathing gets shallow.

It's useful... if you're actually in danger. Like if a tiger jumps at you — fight or flight helps you survive. But anxiety turns on the alarm even when there's no tiger. That's the problem.

There are different types of anxiety disorders — GAD, social anxiety, panic disorder... But mine? Was something called Health Anxiety.

This is when you constantly fear you're sick. A headache? Must be brain tumor. Chest tightness? Definitely a heart attack. Even after normal test results, you don't believe it. You Google symptoms. Check vitals. Again and again. That was me.

After that first panic attack, I felt okay for a while... But I started Googling every small symptom. And I trained my brain to fear my own body.

That's what we call the anxiety cycle.

Let me break it down: You feel a symptom → You panic → You look for reassurance → You feel better briefly → Then it starts again. It's a loop. And I was stuck in it.

In 2022, I got a fever. My heart rate went above 130. I panicked. Rushed to the ER again. They admitted me, ran all tests — everything was fine. But I didn't feel fine.

This started happening again and again — For every small sensation, I ended up in the emergency room.

One day, a doctor said, "You need to see a psychiatrist. This might be anxiety." Like many people, I said, "No no, I'm not crazy." But deep down... I knew something was wrong.

So I gave therapy a try.

My psychiatrist explained: "Your body is reacting to fear that doesn't exist. You're stuck in the fight-or-flight mode, constantly on alert." She showed me the CBT anxiety cycle, taught me how thoughts fuel symptoms.

But... I wasn't ready. I still kept doing scans and blood tests, looking for proof of illness. And it only made me worse.

I started avoiding people. Avoided exercise — thinking it might trigger a heart attack. Stopped attending family events. Even missed school functions for my son.

At one point, I thought, "This is my life now. I'll never come out of this." But there was one thing I didn't do: I never gave up.

I told myself: "This time, I'll cooperate fully with my doctor. No shortcuts. No self-diagnosing."

I asked her all my fears — "Can I go out alone?" "What if I faint in public?" "What if exercise kills me?" She answered everything. I started medication. I started CBT. Slowly... I saw a little light.

But just when I was improving, another twist came.

In June 2022, I had to undergo major surgery — truncal vagotomy and gastrojejunostomy. Post-surgery complications pushed me back into full-blown panic. Googling started again. My old habits returned. And I almost gave up.

Then... something shifted.

In Jan 2023, things settled down. And I looked at my 4-year-old son. I couldn't even take him out to play like other dads.

That moment broke me. And that moment saved me.

I said to myself, “Enough. I won’t let this affect my child’s memories of me.”

So I started again. I took him out — even when my legs were shaking with fear. I sat in public places — even when my heart raced. I did the things that scared me.

This is called exposure therapy — facing fear head-on.

And I started using CBT thought diaries. Each time I had a panic attack, I wrote down: What triggered it, What I felt, What action I took, and most importantly... what was the rational thought I could replace it with.

It wasn't easy.

Some days, I had so many symptoms I couldn't keep up. But with consistency, things began to change.

It's been 18 months. And today — I still get anxious sometimes. But I don't spiral. I don't panic. I don't Google.

Because now I know what's happening inside me.

Let me leave you with this:

Anxiety is not a disease. It's a condition. It may never go away fully — but it can be managed. You are not weak. You are not broken. You are human. And healing is possible.

You just have to take that first step. And then the next. And then the next.

Thank you.