

Originally from: <http://feedproxy.google.com/~r/FinchSells/~3/X3yGpEBef6o/>

This is a post about my experiences taking the popular 'smart drug' modafinil.

I often see friends and marketing acquaintances posting about cognitive enhancers on Facebook.

From smart drugs, to nootropics, to vitamin stacks...

We're all over that like pigs in shit.

Modafinil is a small pill that is becoming difficult to ignore.

I've seen opinions all across the board, from those who swear by it, to those who didn't notice a single change on a high dosage.

As you'll see in this post, I have had both good and bad experiences.

What is Modafinil?

Disclaimer: For the love of Jezuz, please do consult a qualified medical professional before interpreting any of this post with anything other than a pinch of the saltiest balls.

Modafinil is a **wakefulness-promoting agent** used to treat narcolepsy.

It is prescribed to patients who suffer from excessive daytime sleepiness, and those with shift work related sleep disorders.

That's the *official* use.

Off-label, modafinil has become the default 'Smart Drug' of choice for those seeking productivity gains in the form of sustained concentration and intense focus.

It is the unlikely tonic of both CEOs ("[Smart Drugs Are Coming to the Office](#)") and students ("[Smart Drug Taken By One in Four Students](#)").

If you have shit to get done — many piles of it — chances are, you've spared a thought to the idea of a shortcut, or seven.

How can I get more work done whilst procrastinating less?

This is the crowd that modafinil appeals to.

Anybody with an inbox that won't subside, an essay that won't write itself, several pages of code waiting to be freed from the spinning wheels of mental inertia.

The Appeal of Modafinil



Ever see Limitless?

It's a decent movie, with a great central hook.

- *Hopeless Writer Bum procrastinates his life away in failed attempt to deliver manuscript.*
- Writer Bum stumbles across new experimental smart drug, NZT.

- Writer Bum pops the magic brain pill.
- Writer Bum explodes in to fit of productivity and delivers manuscript in a single sitting.
- Editor: *"You OK, hun?"*
- Writer Bum takes over the world, unleashes his true cognitive potential; ably assisted by NZT.
- Goes ape shit in the process.

(Sorry for the spoilers, chaps.)

Limitless was, of course, entirely fictional.

Hollywood Science.

There is no such drug that is capable of 'fully utilising the un-used parts of the brain'.

But, anybody who saw that movie came away with the same idea.

"I'd fuckin' have some of that, matey. Straight down the hatch. No questions asked."

If your moral fibres beg to differ, then you're trespassing on the wrong blog.

And so... **modafinil**.

Arguably the [closest thing we have](#) to an effective brain drug in 2017.

As an affiliate, I heard about modafinil via the usual circles.

On Facebook, Skype and Reddit.

Loads of you swear by it.

Some of you even post photos of the little pill pre-popping.

An ode to a smart friend.

Well, we know affiliates are particularly adept at riding the next hot trend. All the way to the bank.

Trends *don't come no bigger* than a 'smart pill' that decreases your overall BellEnd'atude and slices through the to do list like a knife through jam doughnuts.

(Yes, I'm dribble-typing in a bakery.)

I can't remember when I finally decided to experiment with modafinil, but I tracked that package from the factories of Mumbai like a hawk.

This is it, Finch.

This is is, you pathetic labouring dinosaur.

We're finally gonna get some work done.

MO-DA-FI-NILLLLLLLLLL

Initial Impressions

It's impossible to discount the **placebo effect** when you go to bed *excited* to wake up and try a smart drug.

I'd read so many user accounts and follow alongs that I'd psyched myself up to become a new man.

That said, the first weeks using modafinil were startling.

My routine would look like this:

7:30am — Wake up, pop a tab.

7:45am — Shower and feed the dogs.

8:00am — Wait 30 minutes for my Modafriend to kick in.

8:30am — Arrive at desk.

BLITZKRIEG-MODE

1:00pm — Quick lunch.

1:30pm — Arrive at desk.

BLITZKRIEG-MODE

6:00pm — Dinner and wind down.

7:30pm — Fuck it, arrive at desk.

BLITZKRIEG-MODE

Midnight — Calmly close laptop and think about what I've just done.

Placebo, or no placebo, it didn't really matter.

On the 3-4 days per week that I'd use modafinil, I'd bulldoze my way through tasks where previously I'd been stuttering, getting restless, and eventually reversing back to my News Feed.

The best way I could describe the effect was **rapidly-induced tunnel vision**.

Without really noticing anything different.

The elusive [state of Flow](#) — which I reckon I'd be experiencing now if it wasn't for those jam doughnuts — is where we all want to be.

My first few weeks using modafinil marked a sudden dramatic spike in output where those little distractions that occur throughout the day had no effect on me.

If somebody messaged me on Facebook, I'd barely twitch an eyeball.

If a distracting email landed in my inbox, I wouldn't see it.

My procrastination pro-skill of cycling through news sites, inboxes and social media accounts (Seen them all? Start again...) was overcome through sheer total-minded tunnel vision.

As a result, my first experiences with modafinil — besides the occasional intermittent headache — were entirely positive.

There seemed very little downside.

The Tolerance Builds?

Some of you guys are crazy.

I've read accounts of affiliates going from no modafinil, to taking two pills per day, *every day*, and then wondering why...

- Your sleep is shit-hammered
- The effects of the moda have decreased

I'm going to put this bluntly:

If you have an addictive personality, or don't feel like you could control the urge to say no to

a smart drug on a normal day at the office, then don't get started. *Period.*

It's a no brainer that taking modafinil every day is going to reduce the efficiency of the drug, whilst potentially introducing unwanted side effects (and worse: dependency).

I was mindful of only taking modafinil on days where it would be beneficial — specifically, on tasks that required intense concentration rather than lucid creativity (which btw, it can hinder spectacularly).

Despite this, after several weeks, I noticed that the performance high had tapered off.

I was still getting more work done on modafinil, but without the same intensity or total-mindedness that marked my early experiences.

This could be down to a tolerance of the drug, or an erosion of the placebo effect.

Whatever the case, I did not feel *Limitless*.

End of the Experiment: Panic Attack

My dabbling with modafinil came to an abrupt end in January this year when I suffered a panic attack.

This had never happened to me before.

It scared the shit out of me.

I was sat at lunch with my fiancée, in a food court, feeling overly 'buzzed'.

I had taken modafinil that morning, along with a large highly caffeinated coffee... which I suppose is the equivalent of raising two fingers to the Gods of one's nervous system.

Over the previous weeks I had occasionally felt a sense of unease. Heightened senses. Jittery restlessness.

Particularly around meal times.

My theory was that pulling myself away from work, out of the tunnel, was causing an avalanche of thoughts, feelings and emotions to rapidly rush back in and fill the vacuum chamber I'd created.

I hadn't yet put my finger on **anxiety** as a root cause.

But this day would mark the first time I'd ever felt the need to read about it. To understand the signs.

All of those signs I was feeling over lunch:

- Restlessness
- Fidgeting
- Sweaty palms
- Racing thoughts
- Sense of paranoia
- Sense of foreboding
- Racing heart rate
- Dizziness and nausea
- A complete disconnect from my surroundings
- A need to *GTFO*

Over the years, I've encountered all of these symptoms — to some extent — but never a situation where they'd all come rushing to the surface over a lunch of fucking fried rice.

It was inexplicable.

The colour had drained out of my face, my hands were shaking, and the murmur of foreign voices lurching was swirling around me. One big cacophony of mental noise, amplified by the silence of my fiancée eating her lunch with a concerned look. I don't remember talking, just muttering: "*Need water, I need water, where's the water...*"

Finally grasping that what I was experiencing was a *panic attack*, my next thought was: oh shit.

The modafinil.

It's not going to leave my system for hours yet.

I needed this to be over in seconds, not a whole afternoon.

I left the restaurant in a hurry and we sat outside. I felt like I'd run in to a brick wall, mentally.

Seems crazy, but that's when it dawned on me: it had taken me precisely 29 years to establish how anxiety feels when it manifests physically.

Even though the small signs had been there all along.

I did not like the feeling one bit.

After making it home through an extremely shaky taxi ride where I wanted to jump out of the vehicle and run at the sight of every red light, I went to bed and slept for hours.

The following weeks were tough.

I was shaken badly.

Riddled with this new catch-all feeling of *anxiety*, particularly around meal times.

I suffered a few recurring smaller attacks, despite ditching modafinil.

The recurring theme had become coffee.

Within 25/30 minutes of dousing myself in those sweet velvety beans, I'd grow restless. I'd feel sweaty palms.

I'd be reading the Kindle and panic would sweep over me at the turn of a completely harmless sentence.

I'd flee the coffee shop and spend the next hour pacing my apartment furiously, or laying down and daring my pups: "*Calm me down, calm me down...*".

The closest I came to a short-term fix was playing games of Fifa online.

That way I felt less anxious, and more disgusted at the pause-spamming antics of the bastard who'd just dispatched a mentally understrength Finch FC 4-1.

(And some people call me fickle...)

Anxiety in Disguise

Looking back...

I've suffered from varying degrees of anxiety for as long as I can remember, but the symptoms had never de-railed me, or escalated to such an extent that I felt paralysed by them.

They were too small for a busy mind to notice.

I'd just stampede over them.

A nervous disposition rather than a simmering wreck.

My mind goes back five years to a particularly tough time in my business.

I didn't appreciate it then, but I was under extreme stress and running on toaster fumes. My body was breaking down *without* breaking down.

I'd feel sudden pangs of nausea, a sense of complete disrepair. Dizziness on my feet. An overwhelming sense of... faintness.

I remember fearing I had a heart condition, or diabetes. Blood sugar problems. Who knows? You don't want to speculate online since you know all roads lead to *Oh shit, It must be CANCER.*

What I now assume I was experiencing — the palpitations, the breathlessness, the foreboding deep-sat feeling that something is wrong — was anxiety.

It just hadn't been *triggered* in the way that lead to a panic attack.

And for that, I blame over-stimulation of my nervous system.

Modafinil + coffee.

Maybe It Wasn't the Modafinil?

I can't be sure the modafinil was to blame.

This period in January coincided with several changes:

1. I'd just spent two exhausting weeks in the UK for Christmas. Constant booze + shitty train travel + breaking two toes in the first week = Sheer exhaustion when I got back to Bangkok.

2. Sudden lack of mobility (from the broken toes) had severely restricted my ability to get around Bangkok. Which is pretty integral to my peace of mind.
3. I'd recently gotten engaged — which obviously, I was happy about — but felt overwhelmed with the prospect of organising a wedding in a foreign country. Family and friends gathering 6000 miles away? Organizing the proverbial piss up in a brewery is enough to stress me out, so this was no doubt playing on my mind.
4. I'd recently started taking magnesium supplements, which have been (anecdotally) linked to anxiety attacks when used with modafinil.
5. I'd recently dabbled in float tank and meditation sessions.

I know, meditation and floating sounds stupid as a theory for sudden onset anxiety, right?

Float tanks are *supposed* to be a release from tension and stress, since the mind in zero-gravity has nothing to do but listen to its inner thoughts and 'heal'.

Well... I can see how that might reduce stress.

I can see how it might unleash it, too.

I can't say for sure what caused such a monumental fuck-up of a start to 2017.

As with most post-event reasoning, the answer is probably more of a clusterfuck than I am able to digest.

A combination of events, circumstances; one bad afternoon; and a lot of over-thinking.

But yes, I suspect that modafinil played a part.

The **trigger**, if you will.

Aftermath: Thoughts on the Experiment

Six months on, I'm back to 'normal'.

It took several weeks to shake off the heightened sense of anxiety that followed me around after the panic attack.

I think much of that was down to a self-reinforcing loop:

I started panicking about the panic attack.

What if I have another one? What if this is my future? What if I'm slowly losing the plot?

Taking any more modafinil was the last thing on my mind.

I actually took two whole weeks off work to try and get my shit together. And to deal with the harsh mood swings of quitting caffeine.

You might be wondering...

Were the modafinil productivity gains worth it?

MO-DA-FIN-NILLLLLL

Do I get less done these days without modafinil?

Honestly... yes.

But that is relative to an extremely high bar.

I'm convinced that something *close* to maximum productivity is possible without modafinil — when I'm in 'the zone'.

Although I can spend less time there.

And it is harder to find.

There's no doubt, I get less done on the days where I start badly, or can't focus, or just can't get started.

Net result, after quitting modafinil:

- I'm 10% less effective on my good days
- I'm 50% less effective on my bad days
- I'm less anxious in general
- I'm better at creative tasks

The typical affiliate might look at that and think:

"Jesus, what a bad decision to stop taking it..."

Well.. no.

If you've experienced a panic attack, or sudden onset anxiety, you know that it's simply not worth chasing that extra 10% — or trying to eradicate the bad days — at the expense of your mental health.

Not worth it at all.

Besides, I've built up enough competence over the years to still get more done on my bad days than most people get done in their good weeks.

Having a good team certainly helps with that.

Thoughts on Anxiety in General

While a panic attack in public will have to go down as one of my *shittier experiences* of 2017, I still see it as a positive thing.

The incident opened my eyes to symptoms of anxiety that I have ignored for my entire life.

I never grasped what they were.

It's also made me more empathetic towards others I know who suffer from anxiety. And others, I suspect, who *don't* know they suffer from it.

Previously, if somebody had told me they were feeling anxious, my gut response would be to insist, *"Eh, you'll be fine, there's nothing to worry about"*, and treat it as a lapse of mental strength.

One bad lunch showed me it could be far more insidious than that.

I've also found a few things that helped:

1. Not spiking my adrenaline system with modafinil.

Hey, look, the reason for this post!

I see a lot of affiliates experimenting with modafinil, and other smart drugs.

I don't blame them.

The pursuit of Total Cognitive Enhancement is catnip to me, too.

I've got nothing against that experimentation (clearly), but many of us digital types are built from the same stuff.

Introverts, socially awkward, tunnel vision tendencies, etc, etc.

If any of the above sounds familiar, I would exercise extreme caution in playing with a substance that acts as a central nervous system stimulant.

If you're going to use it, get in sync with your mind and body.

2. Managing caffeine levels

After the panic attack, I immediately gave up coffee.

My theory being... you're a jittering mess, any further stimulation is a bad idea.

Well, quitting coffee didn't have much effect initially.

I suffered a month of smaller 'aftershocks' and a greatly heightened state of anxiety and social unease.

Ironically, the symptoms started to subside at the same time as I reintroduced my daily coffee fix.

(And I'm pretty sure that first cup was what heaven tastes like.)

These days, I max out at two cups of coffee per day.

Hell hath no fury like the thunderbolt coming a barista's way if she should fuck up one of them, or underfill my cup.

I legitimately walked out of Dean & DeLuca a few weeks ago after they *Full-Fat-Milked* me by mistake.

(There's a diva in us all.)

Seriously though, the links between caffeine and anxiety are well documented.

I have noticed an uneasy floating / not-really-there sensation if I over-indulge in coffee beans.

The same over-stimulation of the nervous system, I suspect, that can escalate to a panic attack given the correct trigger.

3. Acknowledging Anxiety As Is

The third and most important tip I've taken onboard was simply the wake-up call from experiencing a panic attack.

Acknowledging anxiety.

I'm learning to *acknowledge* when I'm feeling anxious, without any attempt to alter the state. To accept the feeling at source.

Sounds like a tiny thing, but acknowledging the feeling is a fundamental step towards controlling it.

You know what they say, right?

Self Help 101:

Best way to reduce anger is to stop and acknowledge: *"I can feel the sensation of anger"* ...as opposed to continuing with *"I AM an angry motherfucker"* and launching the first plate.

I used to think that was a bonkers cop-out.

But it contains an element of truth.

Controlling that split second freeze-frame between *"I am"* and *"I feel"* can make all the difference... between wrestling control of your nerves, and faceplanting your fried rice.

Your Thoughts (And More of Mine...)

As always, I'd be interested to hear your thoughts and experiences. On modafinil, panic attacks, anxiety and other epic smart drugs of choice...

Want to hear more from me?

Well, as you can tell, I don't blog much these days.

However I have recently started sending out a monthly 'newsletter' discussing various topics and trends that are relevant to marketers, entrepreneurs (and anybody else reading this shit).

Subscribe below if you want to receive it.

Next newsletter lands next week. See you then.

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