



XXII: ON ADDERALL

“Before you heal someone, ask him if he’s willing to give up the things that make him sick.”

Hippocrates

[...] what makes Adderall such a pernicious drug to quit, aside from that it’s legal, is that it’s not like kicking booze or designer drugs which are clearly deleterious to your health.

By kicking stimulants, there is a 100% chance your performance at work will suffer.

It represents the demise of enhanced productivity.

Lock In, Crash Out

This in itself is too much for many type-A, hypercompetitive and work-obsessed types to give up, and this is why, in my experience these same people never come to a peaceful end. It always ends in burnout or a crash, a *denouement* where they are dragged out of the club by their bad habits rather than leaving on their own volition. It runs deeper than the stimulants, to be fair. It’s an attitude problem. But if you want to get off this ride, you have to accept that you’re going to fall behind by a few spots in the rat race.

To insert my travails into the discussion, Adderall was present during pretty much every bad decision I made, but I believe that it is a grade-A loser move to blame things you say or do on alcohol or drugs. Like when someone says, “Oh, I didn’t mean what I said, I was drunk” — without exception, whenever you hear someone say that, recognize that you are dealing with a grade-A loser.

Those words and actions were in your mind, and the drugs only lowered your inhibitions to where you released them. The same goes for me. Staying up for days on Adderall impaired my judgment, but I had deeper issues that I needed to work out, like horrible habits, a toxic attitude, and judgment that had always been questionable at times. These were all going to eventually cause me problems one way or the other, even if meth had never entered the picture.

A Meth Monologue

To be clear, Adderall *is* meth. White-collar meth. It’s crank, it’s speed, it’s the same drug that *those guys on the streets* are addicted to. The *meth heads*, the speed freaks, the tweakers, they’re the same as *lé*

coastal elites when it comes to drug of choice. Don't get it twisted — just because your meth comes from a doctor doesn't change the fact that the street drug is almost pharmacologically identical.

It takes me less time to type “meth” than it does “Adderall,” and I think it is more beneficial to the reader in terms of how one should accurately view those orange pills and the impact they have on your brain function. So, the two terms will be used interchangeably for the duration of our meth monologue.

I dated a girl many moons ago whose alarm went off at 6:30 AM, yet this wasn't when she would get up and start her day. It used to drive me crazy. The 6:30 alarm was when she'd wake up, take her Adderall, and then roll over and go back to sleep until about 7:00, or whenever the meth hit her bloodstream. After taking it all day, she would be too wired to go to sleep naturally, and so the psych had her on some sort of downer or depressant that would knock her out at night. And that was the life she lived. It's the life that I'm pretty sure most Americans live. Never sober. On pills from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to bed.

I referred to this in “Blind Spots” as the magical merry-go-round of uppers and downers, around and around you go on the wheel of Ixion. The irony of it all is that the pills are originally prescribed to stabilize you, I think. Instead, the first pill has to be counteracted by a second or third pill, putting your emotions in a constant state of flux and having a massively long-term *destabilizing* effect — a sacrifice, nonetheless, that people are willing to make to get ahead in their career.

There Is No Consequence-Free Drug

The best advice I can offer someone who is stuck at this fork in the road is to take a fifty-year view on this stuff. What I mean is that, unless you stop doing what you're doing, you are going to do it until the day you die. That sounds simple, but I don't know how else to put it. The course that you are on, you will stay on that same course until you burn out, crash, or summon up the willpower to make a drastic life change. The choice is yours and only yours, my man. Keep these three random quotes in mind:

One, there is no consequence-free drug. Two, taking drugs and thinking that you are happy is like taking a loan and thinking you have money. Three, if you want to get high, be ready to come down.

Is the juice worth the squeeze?

From the other side, I would say yes. But you have to decide what your priorities are.

Adderall has always messed with my diet, with my sleep, with my mood and with my exercise. Those were sacrifices I was willing to make in order to advance my career.

My priorities are different today. I care about consistently getting eight hours of sleep, working out hard seven days a week, eating clean, and being razor-sharp physically, mentally and emotionally. Once you put those first, you quickly realize there is no place for drugs or booze or pills or anything mind-altering; the only thing I've allowed myself for years now is coffee, and I still go back and forth over whether I should cut that out.

A lot of these choices became clear when I took a fifty-year view. I didn't want to take orange pills, or ANY pills, every single day for the rest of my life. It made me feel weak. I hate feeling weak. I hated feeling like I couldn't accomplish something without the use of prescription meth. It made me feel like an addict, and this ended up being the same reason I committed to giving up nicotine. Not being able to exist without a vape or a cigarette or pouch within arm's reach has a way of making you feel completely pathetic.

I also had started to develop strongly-held views that all of this psychiatric stuff is nonsense, that ADHD isn't real and that it was invented by big pharma to get America hooked on pills. Think back to every *diagnosis* you ever had.

Do you have a hard time paying attention in classes that you don't care about?

Do you get bored when you do things that are boring?

Great questions, doc. Yes, I sure do. Now put the fries in the bag and write the damn script. One never stops to think about how inane these diagnostic questions actually are.

But longer-term, like, look how the government lied to you about how all these vaccines had no side effects. You think that the pharmaceutical industry, driven by a profit motive, is going to be any more up-front about the long-term side effects of all the pills you take? Come on, dude. I would also point out that great men and women have accomplished tremendous feats throughout history without Adderall and Vyvanse; perhaps at an even greater rate than today. When's the last time we built a world wonder? They put up that hideous Vessel thing in Hudson Yards and it seems to be used mostly as a vessel for people to dive off as they transition from this earthly realm into the afterlife.

Getting off stims is a hard choice. I'm not going to sugarcoat it; the first few months are brutal. Flooding your brain with orange daily dopamine pills has a huge impact on how your mind processes pleasure and rewards, and when the meth-induced dopamine intake disappears, your ability to experience pleasure will be crushed temporarily.

You will be lethargic and unfocused, and at times, completely useless and unable to do your job. You will sleep too much. You will gain weight. You will have a difficult time summoning up the energy to do even the most basic of tasks, like answering an email. You will have both increased anxiety and depression symptoms. You will have severe cravings and physical withdrawal symptoms because meth is a highly addictive drug.

This doesn't mean you're weak; it's just as simple as "physically-addictive drugs are highly physically-addictive." Withdrawal is a bitch, and this is why I would advise that if you're going to quit one drug, just quit all the drugs at the same time, alcohol, nicotine, everything, you name it. Take the fifty-year view.

You will not receive very much support throughout this period, and should expect that it'll be a battle you will fight entirely alone.

It is a battle against nobody but yourself. All the battles worth fighting are.

Post-Traumatic Spreadsheet Disorder

Now, everything will eventually normalize. Three months, six months, it depends on how long you were on the train to begin with, but I promise, it will normalize. You will be rewarded with a healthier body and fuller muscles. I don't know if the following claim is backed by science, nor do I particularly care, but Adderall saps the gains you were trying to make at the gym. You will be rewarded with a clear mind that isn't always being either flooded or depleted with artificial chemicals. Your thoughts and your headspace will feel more like a walk-in closet, where you know how to locate everything, rather than a turbulent mess. You will find a level of emotional stability that you didn't even know existed, and as time passes, you will find that you are in pretty much the same mood all the time.

I don't have a problem sitting down for a few hours and building models in Excel without losing focus. Will I ever be able to do it for twelve hours straight like I used to? No, but I'm okay with someone else winning that game. I point this out specifically because in those first few months without stims, I couldn't use Excel. I used to joke with a friend who was going through the same process that we both had PTSD (Post-Traumatic Spreadsheet Disorder).

The thought of Excel nauseated me, and sitting down to try to get anything done made my head hurt. It will normalize, I promise, and you will reach a new equilibrium where you can get things done, albeit at a reduced rate. Do not panic and assume you are defective. I did that. You're not defective; your brain just needs time to adjust after years of being flooded with drugs.

That is as far as I can take you, friend. In the spirit of being a good dude, I would offer my support to anyone reading this, but my support isn't going to be what gets you over the finish line.

Just know that you are not alone, that many, many people struggle with this and are afraid to speak up about it, that the brain will heal, and that glory awaits you on the other side: a silent, beautiful glory, an invisible foe conquered, a victory recorded on a scoreboard no one else can see.

For all the people who talk about needing someone to share a moment with, don't believe the hype; many of the best moments of your life will be between you and God.

This is one of them.

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