

# Not Just a Quarter-Life Crisis

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Hi. I'm new to this site, and I'm happy to see that there are others who are sharing their experiences. I've always been a healthy person. Never really thought about my health in any way other than physical. Until last January.

I'm 23. I'm a songwriter and singer. I live in New York City. From the outside, looking in, it would have appeared last January that things in my life were going swimmingly: I was making music, promoting my first record, winning songwriting awards and scholarships, touring internationally. On the personal front, I had a great boyfriend, a really inexpensive apartment (for New York), friends, and tons of support for my musical dreams. Sure, it's frustrating to get a career going, especially as an entrepreneur, but in spite of whatever challenges there have been, I've always been an optimist and quickly charged ahead.

So, I wasn't at all prepared for that January night. I came home from a great show; I had played for an appreciative audience, sold some CDS, and had dinner with my manager. I felt a little funny as I went to bed, but I figured it was just dinner settling with me. That was 11 pm or so.

By 2 am, I had woken up, feeling strange- the kind of strange you feel when something's not sitting right in your stomach. I sat straight up in bed, and within two minutes, I was on the floor of my tiny box apartment, trying to breathe. The room was spinning. My heart was racing wildly, and I was HOT. I was sure I had to throw up, but I couldn't. I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think. I felt trapped inside my own mind. I thought I was dying. I called my parents in CT, the first time I had ever called them about my health since moving to New York. After trying to calm me down, to no avail, my father agreed with my sobs that I should call an ambulance.

Well, long story short, after the inevitable hours-long wait in the NYC emergency room, the doctor could find nothing wrong with me. Vital signs? Check. Breathing fine? Check. And I actually felt better. After waiting around the ER for hours, I walked out the front door as if nothing had happened and took a cab home.

The next day, and in the following weeks, I was scared, and confused. What about the abdominal pains, the way my system flushed itself out angrily as I cried? What about how I couldn't think, couldn't stand up, couldn't even feel sure by lying on the floor? I saw a doctor, who suggested that maybe I was anxious. No way, I said. But, after I left, I started to think about it.

Since then, I have come to realize, through other smaller incidents, that I have suffered from panic attacks. I read some thorough information on the NIH and Mayo Clinic websites, and realized that my symptoms match. But, fortunately, I also read some good things about how to prevent them.

I get random attacks, when I get them, which is rare. No certain place or thing triggers them, although I suspect that a big part of it is fear that my career won't go where I want it to or maybe that it WILL, and it won't end up being what I thought it would be, or that I won't like it, or myself, anymore. With that said, here are some things that have really helped me manage my anxiety level:

1. Exercise. About 30 minutes of aerobic exercise every day has helped me to blow off steam and de-stress
2. Taking short walks. When I get heated, or start feeling myself stress about something, sometimes it just takes a short

walk with deep breaths of fresh air to calm down.

3. Breathing. Breathing deeply and openly.

4. Telling myself that "I'm OK." "Everything's all OK." Because it really IS. It really is OK. I am OK. I am fine just the way I am and I'm WORKING on the person and the artist I'll eventually be. I don't have to "get there" today.

5. Talking. Especially to my wonderfully supportive boyfriend. I can't tell you how much it's meant to have one person who will listen and not try to tell me I'm nuts.

6. Reminding myself that I'm a person, not a machine. There are only so many things I and my brain can do in a day. As my own booker, promoter, songwriter, singer, bandleader, driver, and distribution center, it's hard to remember that sometimes, but I'm getting better at planning and prioritizing for less stress.

7. Putting it in perspective. Yes, anxiety attacks are scary. Yes, sometimes I'm scared that this will never stop, this cycle. But it helps me to remember that there are worse things happening in the world. There are many afflictions I could have that DON'T go away, and I'm so grateful that I am healthy and strong enough to deal with this. I'm committed to learning how to balance the pieces of my life, to manage the many tasks I face as an independent artist, so that I don't feel overwhelmed and break down.

Realizing that I do have anxiety, and that other people do too, has taught me a few things. First, it shattered my misconception that you can be "too young" for something like this. It taught me that there IS a community, you, that I can learn from and hopefully help as well. And it taught me that there are more important things in life than professional success, money, and ambition. My health and my sanity are important and not to be ignored. And if I can teach someone else not to ignore theirs, then the attacks I went through will be turned around into something positive, for me, and for others.