

Chapter 1 – Introduction

“If your goals are not scaring you, set the bar higher.” JD

It doesn't matter if you are a lawyer, doctor, engineer, or young professional. Your knowledge may be useless if you don't follow these simple steps. Imagine being in a state of mind where you cannot function or concentrate on your job. It won't matter if you know how to surgically remove half the brain of someone so they can survive. It doesn't matter if you are a highly paid professional with years of education and experience. Depression and brain fog can still come for you. What will you do then?

We have all been in a situation where we cannot think straight and need help and guidance to climb out of this seemingly infinite pit. It takes months and years to get out of crippling depression and brain fog so thick that you can't even think right. At this point, our years of education, material wealth, family or personal life have no meaning. What good is it anyway, when you are burnt out beyond capacity, and the only aspect of life that keeps you going is the paycheck at the end of the long and hard month? Where will you find the energy to spend that money and enjoy it?

We know what depression is like, but many don't realize that brain fog is also a symptom of depression or severe chronic fatigue. However, brain fog manages to make our lives just as difficult. Brain fog is a very real condition characterized by forgetfulness, confusion, and a lack of focus or mental clarity. There are many reasons we experience this, such as overworking, lack of sleep, stress, and even spending too much time on the computer.

I know this because I have experienced going through all these symptoms of brain fog, which also hinted at the severe depression I had. It is generally believed by the medical community that this condition is caused by high inflammation levels and hormonal changes, which determine our mood, energy, and focus. These severely and sometimes chronically imbalanced hormone levels wreak havoc and chaos in our system, bringing both mental and physical health down.

If left untreated for a long time, brain fog syndrome paves the way for other conditions such as obesity, abnormal menses, and diabetes. For any treatment to work, first, we need to uproot and remove the underlying causes of the issue. Brain fog is typically a direct cause of a lifestyle that doesn't promote hormonal balance and harmony. A lifestyle deeply entrenched in stress and worry.

In this book, I will share some of the behaviors I have adopted to pull out of this condition. For instance, we sit in front of our computers all day and use mobile phones and tablet devices obsessively, which can cause electromagnetic radiation. We take in a lot of unnecessary stress that we may not even be aware of. Did you know any type or level of stress reduces blood flow to the brain, which is why people with chronic stress also often have poor memory? Bad quality of sleep is another reason. To function well, we need a good night's sleep, but people suffering from brain fog often complain of having little to no sleep. Lack of physical activity or exercise is also a contributing factor.

Healthy eating is very important! Someone suffering from brain fog and depression also usually has a bad or unbalanced diet. Additionally, our current environment, brimming with toxins, pollution, chemical substances, and insecticides, also plays a major role in bringing even the strongest person to their knees.

The thing is that mental decline in people is the direct result of poor lifestyle choices as well as the inability to work on bettering it. Mental decline, followed by physical deterioration, is a very common condition and one of the most feared. However, you can help yourself! There are many ways you can maintain better brain function that I will talk about in the subsequent chapters.

While I don't guarantee overnight success, it is still better to seek help as it is the first sign you want to improve. Trust me, sometimes, this is all that it takes. In my years of doing extreme triathlons worldwide, I have learned many valuable life lessons. I am here to share some of this exclusive knowledge with you and help you get back on your feet faster than it took me. Yes, it took me years to get back on my feet and battle depression. But with this invaluable knowledge, it may take you less!

I have lived many stressful events in my life. However, I will focus on the portion of my

life where I acquired the most momentum to get myself out of this misery. This forward motion began when I went to get a college diploma in Construction Engineering. Heck, I even finished at the top of my class. After graduating, I joined a top university in a special program called Integrated Engineering, which included all the different fields of Engineering in one hybrid discipline. I didn't enjoy the way material was taught to us, but I still did my best to complete this program.

My mind was wired differently then, but I hated my life and felt I was not living completely. I wanted a fulfilling life, but where to find one? My debilitating symptoms and low self-esteem prevented me from doing something about it. Even when doing the tasks, I was supposed to be doing, which I didn't realize until much later, was a part of the cause of my depression and brain fog. It got so bad that I couldn't even function well or think. Depression is an ugly condition; it takes so much from us, and many years of my life were lost to it. Only the people around me, who knew me, noticed my distress and silent call for help.

Did I get the help I needed? No! I did try to get the help I desperately needed, yet I couldn't get it. I discovered that most of the people I would reach out to weren't prepared to help me. Hence why I created this book. Some of them didn't really care despite their good words, and the majority were happy it was happening to me and not to them. Unfortunately, this is the way of the world. Many people are so deeply absorbed in their lives that most don't care about others. Even my father, whom I reached out to, didn't know how to react to my obvious depression. He couldn't help me because he, like most people, was never taught how to deal with these situations. It has been some years, but I am happy to announce that my dad has since changed his approach.

At some point, we even fought, which made the situation worse. I remember lying on the couch, looking at the ceiling, not blinking, and completely numb. The minutes would turn into hours and hours into days. The only thing I had going on was that I was breathing, and apparently, it was enough. I cannot even count the number of hours thinking I couldn't become anyone with a positive future. The level of distress I suffered from believing that others would reject me was beyond my comprehension. I just had to remind myself that I was enough to get better. This daily reminder was necessary to improve my attitude toward basic tasks. I was happy, in a way, that breathing was not a conscious decision. Otherwise, this pragmatic behavior might have stopped

my existence. I realized I had been investing my time and energy in the wrong people, which also took a huge toll on my overall health.

I started my journey into triathlon a few years before college. Back then, I had completed only two sprint triathlon and an Olympic distance. Because I wanted to focus solely on my schooling, I didn't compete into triathlon until years later. While in my senior year of university and at the peak of my depression, I turned to extreme endurance triathlons to cope with the surging number of stressors in my life. Without any form of specific workouts geared towards triathlon, I originally began with a full Ironman in the middle of a summer break from school. At the time, I only challenged myself to be on the start line. I don't recommend this strategy to anyone! I could have seriously injured myself. However, my depression was so severe that the pain of a full ironman without training was less than the pain I felt inside. The worst part is that no one could even see my distress. Meanwhile, my only goal was to finish the event. Now, I can achieve much larger events because I put in the necessary efforts and actions to reach that stage. I enjoyed the experience of finishing my first ironman. The process of completing this event drove me to do another one two months after. I was sitting in the back of the class wondering when I would live this experience again. I looked online and registered for another in the same weekend. I went to see the professor after class to tell her I wouldn't be present on the Friday. She surprisingly encouraged me to pursue this path and that she would send me an email with some homework. I got home, put my bike in my vehicle and drove to Louisville, Kentucky. I slept in a hotel and for the first time, I was motivated to complete my homework.

When I got back from Kentucky, I registered for my first Ultraman race. I contacted a local running coach to acquire the necessary tool to be confident enough to complete this event. He was happy to put me into contact with a triathlon coach. That evening, I met Jeffrey Schiller, an accomplished cyclist himself who has helped hundreds of athletes achieve their athletic objectives. Our first interview was strange since I didn't know the value of my acquired curse which would eventually turn into a blessing. Because Jeff was normally only accepting elite athletes, I believed I had no chance of being coached by this man. Nonetheless, he was intrigue by my story and wanted to take part of this journey. He was one of the first to notice that I wasn't out to reach a specific outcome such as going to the Olympic or improving my time on a 5km run. He noticed immediately that I was on a quest and seeking answers to better myself.

I also admit that I was one of the worst athletes a coach could have. Jeff would put in place a specific training plan and I would add random races every weekend. His level of patience with me throughout the years have always surprised me. I remember one time he contacted me through social media to see how training was going. I answered that I drove to New York during the school break and was scheduled to race a half marathon in the weekend. Disappointed, he had to talk to me about the necessity of not racing constantly. With the minimal amount of knowledge, I had toward my psychological condition, I explained that my mind was broken and needed this mental boost to keep me motivated to live. I would find all sorts of race to keep my mind occupied. One year later, I competed in the Ultraman Canada race. This was the beginning of a new era for me. The challenge consisted of a 10km swim, 421km bike ride, followed by a double marathon of 84km. All of it was over the span of three days and had a 12-hour cutoff time for each day. The most surprising was that after each event I would simply keep training. Even in the days where my coach would schedule a few workouts, I would always end up adding an extra training or two in the day. Jeff and I had many discussions regarding this method. He also understood that my mental health was the principal factor to keep me alive. I was essentially destroying my being, and nothing seemed to be stopping me. This journey eventually led me to the Epicdeca, the longest endurance event that I completed to this date.

The Epicdeca is a challenge that consists of 10 Iron-distance triathlons in 10 consecutive days on all 6 Hawaiian Islands. For those who are not familiar, an Iron-distance is a 3.8km swim, 180km bike ride, followed by a 42km run. The first two iron-distances would be on the island of Oahu. The following two would be conducted on Kauai. Trailed by a single iron-distance on Maui, Lanai, and Molokai in that order. Finally, we would travel to the big island to complete the last three full iron-distances.

The Epicdeca is an ultra-triathlon adventurous experience that, due to challenging logistic, could only accommodate a small group setting of 10 athletes worldwide. The race was put in place by the company Epic5, which conduct a Hawaiian race that is half that distance every year. Only for their ten-year anniversary, the company decided to double their annual distance. Some athletes were also registered in the Epic5 challenge and would do the same course as the Epicdeca once we reached the fourth iron-distance. Needless to say, it was the ultimate once-in-a-lifetime experience.

The Epicdeca aims to get people to challenge themselves while going through the beautiful Hawaiian Islands. In fact, many people have completed 10 Iron-distance in 10 days. Most of the time, this is an event that is done on a closed course. However, the difficulty of the Epicdeca challenge was that not only did we have to complete the challenge on a course that was open to traffic but also travel from island to island with a crew of minimum four individuals.

Taking part in the Epicdeca challenge also helped my understanding of life and how to get better. While the Epicdeca wasn't necessarily the sole source of help, my effort and willpower brought me to that stage. What does that tell us? We need to do the work! In essence, many people go to university and never find what they want. Yet some find their purpose and calling through these institutions. Ultimately, what matters most is the effort you are willing to put into achieving a desired outcome.

But before this, I was an absolute mess. I literally destroyed my mind and body to recover from the ordeal my lifestyle choices and unforeseen circumstances had put me through. Instead, I discovered how to recover faster and live healthier for longer! While my parents didn't have much money when I was growing up, I still managed to live life fine – or barely – which I was surviving daily. Additionally, my education didn't save me from the feelings of low self-esteem and depression I always felt. I didn't know what to do about it. Similarly, I kept thinking about life, and that I was just one major hurdle away from everything falling apart.

A lot in life is often viewed from an egotistic point of view. We begin to think that our degree, profession, or even money is infallible and will save us from often undesired destructive outcomes of major life events. I am here to tell you that it is hard to escape from the difficulties that will come your way, one way or another. Difficulties will come sooner or later; how can you prepare to escape from it? You may get overworked, feel down, depressed, and not even have the time to address your basic spiritual, mental, and physical needs. What kind of life is worth living like this?

All research suggests that we now live longer yet don't have healthier habits. We are also not living in a meaningful way, as we are meant to live. Many people live to be old, in their late 80s or 90s, but are they living all these years healthy? In fact, many people are not necessarily strong or well. While it may be due to the age factor, it is also due to living a life of stress and

unhealthy coping mechanisms.

And to think I was one of those who briefly considered death as the only way out of my miserable existence. Yes, I know; how could I want to end it all just because I had certain traumatic experiences or even may not have certain things in life that other people my age had. My family isn't well-connected, nor have they amassed wealth. We never lacked essentials like food, water or even a roof over our heads. What we did lack was exposure to the sports I wanted to do, as well as basic love and care, which are important aspects of life for a child. Eventually, I figured out that I was tired of being in a perpetual survival mode of the continuous hurdles I would have to overcome.

How Did I Survive?

One of the most important reasons I am alive and well today is that I wanted to survive. I was always constantly hungry for more! I wanted to know more, whether it was knowledge, experience, or anything else. I spent my life always trying my best and looking for opportunities to turn my life around and impact others in the process.

“Life is meant to be a challenge because challenges are what makes you grow.” – Manny Pacquaio

Perhaps the best person to get inspired in life is none other than Manny Pacquaio. A formidable boxing legend yet humble person. Manny has done so much to turn his life around for the better. Going from a hungry for food child to a hungry for world title boxing champion. In the process, he has also helped change the fate of his family and other people. Fondly nicknamed PacMan, he is debatably regarded as one of the greatest professional boxers of all time. The man behind the legend has also done amazing things outside of the ring as a humanitarian philanthropist and senator of the Philippines. How did he turn his life around? Through sheer grit, perseverance, resilience, and a deep understanding of his own limitations as well as strengths.

Similarly, success for me is defined by being able to complete these events, learn from my mistakes, and impact as many people as possible to understand they can also achieve so much more than their own limiting beliefs permit.

For me, life means to be satisfied with what you have achieved but also enjoy the present moment. Especially when an opportunity may arise to surprise your learning process on this journey. Always look forward and see what you can build. Odds are that you may shape something better than you thought couldn't be possible. Always stay curious and ask questions. Keep your eyes and ears open. Listen and see because you never know what you might learn.

I lived by this motto all my life, even when in the pits of depression. I kept having this urge to challenge myself. I wanted to see how far my ruined mind and body could go before shutting down. I have condensed a solid step process from the lessons I have learned over the years that I applied during the Epicdeca journey. These techniques worked so well that I seized the chance of a lifetime and became one of the world's only three finishers of the Epicdeca. This achievement was huge in my sight, especially because my family doesn't have any professional athletes. I certainly didn't win the genetic lottery.

Are you already going through dark and painful times? Maybe a death in the family, divorce, estrangement, or work stress is getting to you. It could be anything! Remember, the path to healing and recovery took me years to traverse; it might just be a walk in the park for you with the help of this experiential knowledge.

You may wish to go and find all this knowledge on your own. You may find the path you are looking for, or worse, you may never find it. However, finding it on your own may take years of self-reflection, if not tens of thousands of dollars in therapy sessions. My favorite self-destructive pattern was doing it by myself, free, with random videos that would please my mood when I sporadically had a difficult day. I would end up retaining very little information due to the fact the content was free. I had no commitment and was endlessly searching for answers. I believe this process can assist people in conquering the heaviness in their hearts and return you to your real thriving selves.

In the following pages, I explain an easy-step process that can be applied to most stressful situations. Additionally, you will find herein knowledge regarding this journey that led me to do this triathlon adventure. I have tried to separate both the process and stories to make it easier to depict relevant pieces of the content that is being conveyed. Each chapter will commence with the steps, followed by the story line. This is done so that this book may be used as a reference without

having to go through the entire storyline. I am pleased to share this, pain to success, journey with you. My personal experiences and stories are used as an example to show you that success over major depressive conditions can be overcome. If you are not motivated, I hope you are at least entertained. Regardless, I am happy you are reading my first book and encouraging me to grow.

While this book is not a medical guide, it can be a great starting point for those who want to explore alternative pathways for improving their health. It offers up a simple yet effective approach that improved my physical and mental wellbeing. The information in this book can help provide insight into how our lifestyle choices are connected to our overall health and provide the tools to make changes that can have a positive impact. Of course, it is always important to consult with a healthcare professional before making any major changes to your lifestyle. Taking the time to read this book and reflect on what it teaches can be a great way of learning more about yourself and your health, as well as helping you make better decisions regarding your wellbeing.

I cannot guarantee your results. However, many people have gone through this process and come out to the other end better than they ever were. The key here is that you need to conduct consistent application of this system. Implement it right away and follow it every day without fail. I would love to hear how this book has transformed your life and if you added your own twist to this recipe. Come dive and learn from the tumultuous peripeties of this journey that led me to the Epicdeca.