



# There's Noooo Way that's Placebo

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The journey that led me here is a decade long. I now find myself wanting to scream from the rooftops a message of hope that many might welcome in these stressful times. Coping with COVID-19, the violence and anxieties that unsettled Hong Kong, and other major challenges keep piling up.

This story began in Hong Kong during the 2008 Financial Crisis. It has spanned the 12 years since, crossed many countries, and found a happy resolution as I sheltered from COVID-19 in Savannah and then returned home to Hong Kong. Quite a ride.

In January 2020, my wife and I decided I should take my daughter to family in America. The idea was to stay ahead of the coronavirus. On 31 January, I booked two seats on the first available flight, and the next morning my daughter and I flew west to America and a surprise visit to where COVID-19 hadn't made any headlines. Feels like a lifetime away!

En route, I did some reading of scientific papers and decided to run a one-man clinical trial. My experiment: can a cannabis-based product finally help get me off venlafaxine, the commonly-prescribed medication used to treat General Anxiety Disorder?

Sold as Effexor, venlafaxine is a kind of medication called a selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor. These drugs have helped many like me who have struggled to deal with panic attacks, PTSD, and other major mental troubles.

Venlafaxine has clearly helped my brain get the chemical balance needed to cope with Hong Kong's high-stress hustle and bustle. As my GP explained when I first took the pills, some people just happen to need the drug to get through a day in Hong Kong. It's a kind of health supplement. Some people may need vitamin B or iron to stay healthy, and I need venlafaxine. No shame and no big deal.

Although I had survived three near-death experiences, they didn't affect me all that much. A rock-climbing accident, being runover by a car, and nearly drowning in the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami could have left me a wreck. But they didn't. Instead, what pushed me over the edge was life in Hong Kong during the 2008 Financial Crisis. That one hit me hard.

Writing this now during the Covid pandemic, I can only imagine how many people around me will also crack under the stresses and strain.

When my panic attacks began, I did what many people do. I coped by using the one sedative many people rely on: booze. Socially acceptable, so many of pop into the 7/11 or Circle K to take the edge off. Wine, whiskey, beer, or any other drink are easily the most common anti-anxiety medication around, even if we don't really talk about booze like that.

I eventually needed something more specific, and my GP prescribed Xanax and other drugs. Most of it was hit and miss until I used Effexor. It just did the trick for my specific needs.

Weeks before the flight to Savannah, I was chatting with another parent as we waited for our daughters to come out of school. He talked about how cannabidiol (or CBD) was really promising when it comes to treating anxiety. Only discovered in 1940, CBD oil is a cannabis-based chemical that doesn't get people high or stoned, like when they smoke or eat marijuana.

Legal in Canada, increasingly legal across the USA, and legal in Hong Kong, many people are beginning to realize how incredible this chemical is for helping our bodies cope.

Curious, my daughter and I listened to a podcast on CBD oil while driving back from her school. I was intrigued. Years ago, I completed training in Clinical Trials Research from the University of Hong Kong. Although I know

very well why a drug trial with only one patient is hardly the stuff of good science, my training informed how I would shape my experiment.

The day after we landed in Savannah, I walked to a CBD shop near my parents' house and bought a bottle of the oil. Then, I progressively cut the venlafaxine dosage over five weeks, dropping from 150mg per day to zero, replacing it with a dropper-full of CBD oil in the morning and again before bed.

For Week 1, I split the Effexor capsule to take 100mg per day for a week, as well as the CBD oil. For Week 2, I only took 50mg plus a dropper-full of CBD in the morning and night. During Week 3, I was down to 25mg per day plus the CBD. For Week 4, I was down to 12mg per day, plus the CBD oil in the morning and at night. By Week 5, I was completely off the medication. Since the first week of March, I've only been taking CBD oil.

The biggest worry was that what I felt from the CBD oil was just the placebo effect. That is, instead of CBD oil actually helping my brain chemistry, what I felt was the expectation of an effect when there really wasn't.

Here's the thing: venlafaxine is powerful. Anyone who has taken it will know how it has to be taken very carefully – even missing one dose can have serious side effects. I had tried to wean off it a few times, but each time the side effects were severe.

Looking back at how effective CBD oil has been, I would be shocked if the effect was placebo. Cutting venlafaxine from 150mg to nothing so fast is a big deal, especially given what life has been like these past many months!

The fact is plain and clear: I cut my venlafaxine out with no side effects and zero panic attacks. That's huge.

As a nurse-friend texted me after I told her about my experience, "There's nooooo way that's placebo. Effexor is known as the most difficult to taper off of. I'm amazed by this!"

And it really has been amazing. With venlafaxine behind me and the panic attacks gone, it's not as if the world around me has moved back to normal. Far from it. Covid continues to rage, disrupt, and even ruin some people's lives.

The world remains filled with grim news and deepening anxiety. For many battling these stresses and other hardships, maybe CBD oil could be

part of the healing process. If my story can help even one other person who was like me, then here's me trying to shout out my story from the rooftops.

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