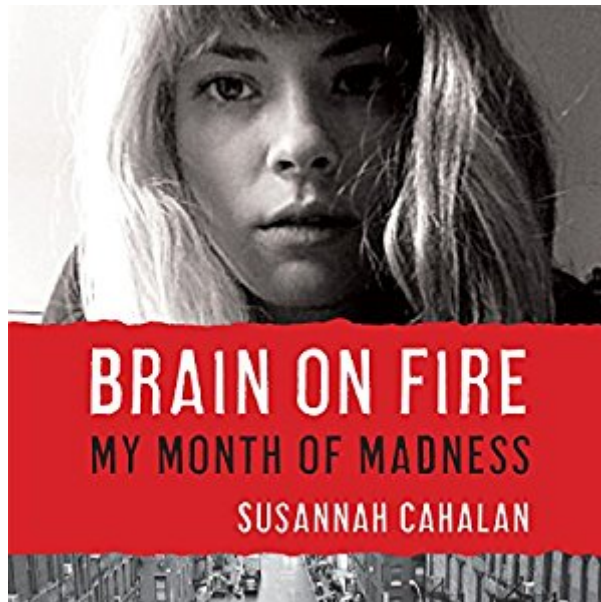




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# Brain On Fire: My Month Of Madness



## Synopsis

In 2009, Susannah Cahalan woke up in a strange hospital room strapped to a bed, under guard, and unable to move or speak. Her medical records - from a month-long hospital stay of which she had no memory - reported psychosis, violence, and dangerous instability. Yet, only weeks earlier she had been a healthy, ambitious twenty-four-year-old, six months into her first serious relationship and a sparkling career as a cub reporter. Susannah's astonishing memoir chronicles the swift path of her illness and the lucky, last-minute intervention led by one of the few doctors capable of saving her life. Weeks ticked by and Susannah moved inexplicably from violence to catatonia. Over one million dollars worth of blood tests and brain scans revealed nothing. The exhausted doctors were ready to commit her to the psychiatric ward, until the celebrated neurologist, Dr. Souhel Najjar, joined her team. With the use of a simple - yet ingenious - test, he was able to make a lifesaving diagnosis - revealing a newly discovered autoimmune disorder in which the body attacks the brain. With sharp reporting drawn from hospital records, scientific research, and interviews with doctors and family, *Brain on Fire* is a crackling mystery and an unflinching, gripping personal story that marks the debut of an extraordinary writer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I will be forever grateful to Susannah Cahalan for writing this book. It was brought to my attention by a friend and reading it was what lead us to a diagnosis of Autoimmune Encephalitis for my son. This neurological disease has only been identified in the past twelve years and is not widely understood.

It is often misdiagnosed as mental illness due to the neuro-psychotic nature of some of the symptoms. The six months proceeding my son's diagnosis were their own kind of hell, and I am not being mellow dramatic when I say that in writing this book, Susannah gave my son his life back. Without it I have no doubt that he would have been institutionalized. If you have any interest in the brain, medicine, or just enjoy a good medical drama please read this book. Not only is it a gripping medical story, but it raises awareness of an obscure and difficult to diagnose neurological disease. We need all the help we can get to raise awareness of Autoimmune Encephalitis and reading this book is a great place to start. Thank you from the mother of an Autoimmune Encephalitis warrior

This was a really good read, and a very interesting peek into the mind of someone who suffered from a psychological breakdown. Her writing style is very honest, and the way she intersperses her memories with descriptions of some of the camera footage from when she was in the hospital helps the reader to piece everything together, even as she herself tries to figure out what happened to her.

Very informative. Gave great insight to those not suffering from the silent about those that are. My niece is going through this as of this review and the book has helped my family greatly with understanding the disease, the symptoms, the treatment, and recovery. I want to personally thank the author for telling the world her story of normalcy, adversity, then triumph.

In short chapters, Susannah Cahalan tells her tremendous story of surviving a rare autoimmune disease and the loss of her life as she knew it. Her raw account of waking up in the hospital, having mental breakdowns, and the frustration of the health care system had me in tears as well as ready to go to bat for her. I couldn't put the book down. I connected with Susannah to the core. Five years ago, I went through a similar health scare and life altering experience. I awoke in a hospital after being unconscious five days. As a result of a freak tree accident, I had a broken neck. During my numerous battles with the health care system and a lengthy nine-month recovery, I too lost the life as I knew it. When I finally returned home to Florida after living with my mother in Massachusetts, it wasn't home sweet home. I had changed from my experience just as she did. I saw the world with new eyes. Bravo to Susannah for recovering, returning to writing, and sharing your story to help others whether with her specific autoimmune disease, other health scares, or making it through a challenging loss of identity and independence caused by another trauma.

When my dear friend Rustie recommended this book, I bought it to read life experiences of someone else who has been down the rabbit hole and is surviving many years longer than were expected, or at times, cared to have. Autoimmune diseases are ever so unpredictable. Multiple sclerosis has so many similarities, including the thought that if you reveal your true thoughts, you will be chased by the men in the pretty white coats. The author captures what many of us go through so accurately that I couldn't just read it...it was as if I were reliving a past that still has many gaps that still cannot be filled. I could turn this into my own little life story if I hadn't regained my sense of time and interest others might have about my thoughts on this book, so I will close by saying this superb book will touch your life in many ways, especially if you have been unlucky enough to draw life's short straw with medical mysteries.

Having just completed "Brain On Fire...", the harrowing account of one young woman's brain ravaged by a once considered rare disease, I am reminded of how fortunate we are in this country. Though the list of complaints regarding American health care is a lengthy one, ours is clearly head and shoulders above all others. Ms. Cahalan chose the high road post-recovery. While some often opt to exist in a quagmire of self-pity and depression over what was once had and now lost, Susannah embraces her new self. Countless positives emerge from her negative experience. I must mention the segment towards the end, when the author studies a photo of herself. She is unable to identify the piece of herself she perceives to be missing. What was lost? Ms. Cahalan's innocence. Her illness took a large piece of her young adulthood, forcing her to mature quickly. Just saying. There is no hesitation on my part to recommend this book. Its impact will vary; those who have been diagnosed (like me) with a neurological/autoimmune disease may be able to find some sort of peace with their experience. Others will be blown away. As a physician, I must debate the author's view regarding Dr. Bailey. Yes, he judged. He generalized using one swift and broad stroke, then cast Susannah aside with the other young adults of today who he perceives party as hard as they work. Without argument this is unacceptable patient mismanagement. However, in Dr. Bailey's defense there is something known as the 'evolution of disease'. Every disease well-known to us today such as AIDS, SLE, Multiple Sclerosis and Lyme Disease (to name a few) all began as a cluster of unrelated symptoms. All were once unstudied and unheard of, slowly evolving into something warranting a name. This now named disease process gradually becomes recognized and increasingly researched (with funding). This results in the rising number of diagnosis made. The previously unheard of disease now becomes one that is known....as did the author's encephalitis. A handful of cases grew into dozens, hundreds, then thousands. There was a time when Parkinson's

Disease was unheard of. Schizophrenics were once viewed as demon-possessed. Crohn's Disease was a questionable condition attributed to bowel hyperactivity of primarily anxious women. Diabetes was an unforeseen star on a future horizon. People cannot fathom the staggering number of diseases in medicine. Physicians are well-trained in their recognition and treatment of as many afflictions as possible. What I'm saying is this: Though there are times when true misdiagnosis is glaringly obvious (Dr. Bailey), those times are a far cry from the medical professional not being aware of a newer disease in the making. This can mean the difference between life and death, thus highlighting the need for multiple medical opinions. Two, three or even four brains are better than one. An unknown evolves into a well known. Awareness follows. We cannot ask for or demand more.

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