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Reasons To Stay Alive

REASONS
TO STAY
ALIVE

M A T T H A I G



Synopsis

Like nearly one in five people, Matt Haig suffers from depression. *Reasons to Stay Alive* is his inspiring account of how, minute by minute and day by day, he overcame the disease with the help of reading, writing, and the love of his parents and his girlfriend (now wife), Andrea. And eventually, he learned to appreciate life all the more for it. Everyone's lives are touched by mental illness; if we do not suffer from it ourselves, then we have a friend or loved one who does. Haig's frankness about his experiences is both inspiring to those who feel daunted by depression and illuminating to those who are mystified by it. Above all, his humor and encouragement never let us lose sight of hope. Speaking as his present self to his former self in the depths of depression, Haig is adamant that the oldest cliché is the truest - there is light at the end of the tunnel. He teaches us to celebrate the small joys and moments of peace that life brings and reminds us that there are always reasons to stay alive.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Have you ever had a book that you were simultaneously unable to wait for and very scared of reading? That was Matt Haig's *Reasons to Stay Alive* [Matt is the author of *The Humans*, which you should ALL know by now that I LOVE]. I'm sure you can tell from the title a little of what it's about, and you may or may not have been able to guess why I was nervous to read it. I am depressed. I have depression. I am a depressive. Do you know how terrified I am to say that? Petrified. But I'm going to say it because it will make it that much more clear why I needed and appreciated this book. From the very moment I heard about it, I needed it. I read this

entire book in roughly 4.5 hours. I devoured it. I also cried more than I have probably EVER cried while reading a book. But I also smiled. Maybe not a lot, but it happened. The synopsis says "It's also an upbeat, joyous and very funny exploration of how to live better, love better, read better and feel more." I was pleased to find that to be very true. I felt a lot reading this book. I like that Matt mentioned that not everyone's depression is the same, that you can be both happy and sad at the same time ("just as you can be a sober alcoholic"), and how most people will not be able to see it: "To other people, it sometimes seems like nothing at all. You are walking around with your head on fire and no one can see the flames." My heart pounded so HARD in my chest practically the entire time I was reading, just as it is beating hard just writing this all down. Matt said at one point he hoped someone else would read his words and that maybe the pain he felt wasn't for nothing. I know it wasn't for nothing, but THANK YOU, Matt, for writing this book, for being brave and open and honest, for showing me I wasn't alone no matter what the depression told me, for telling me that life will wait for me, for *The Humans*, for all of your words, for being alive. Let's get down to the bottom line, shall we? Read this book. Read this book because you have emotions and hopes and feelings. Read this book because you are human and because you are alive. Read this book to live. *Reasons to Stay Alive* is a celebration of life, books, words, and humanity.

Matt Haig writes more than once how he continues to check his book reviews and is bothered greatly by any poor reviews. So the first thing I think of in writing this review is that Matt will read this and I hope he doesn't take it too hard that I felt 3 stars was the most I could give. I read the first 100 pages, then began to skim a bit through the remainder of the book but finished most of the content. The thing about depression and anxiety is that each person's experiences are very individual. So I was able to relate to some of what Matt wrote, and found it hard to relate to the rest. I do recommend this book to anyone who may be deep in the throngs of suffering through depression/anxiety because you may find it somewhat comforting to read Matt's experience's and his overcoming of it. I did pick up a handful of good thoughts or ideas from the book but I also agree somewhat with what another reviewer wrote about not being able to remedy depression with a shopping list of short feel goods. On the other hand, you do need to try these things as well because even though the lists seem simplistic, even unrealistic to some, they may help or work for others and it's worth trying. Overall I do applaud Matt for sharing such personal matters and trying to help others with sharing. And Matt, if you are reading this I think you can feel good about your book because I have little doubt that it will help some readers and probably even keep someone alive,

and what a great achievement that is.

I've loved Matt Haig's novels for adults and kids for close to a decade now. His books are invariably funny and wise, offering a unique outlook on the world and its foibles. They also can be quite emotionally affecting; I remember finishing his last book, *THE HUMANS*, while on a transatlantic flight. Perhaps it was the vulnerability of the long-distance traveler, but I definitely had tears streaming down my face at the end of the novel, marveling at Haig's ability to capture the intertwined joy and sadness of being fully alive and fully human. In the afterword to his new memoir, *REASONS TO STAY ALIVE*, Haig mentions that *THE HUMANS* was his first novel in which he acknowledged, even obliquely, his long-time struggles with depression. His experiences writing it eventually drew him to pen this memoir, to explore in greater depth his journey from the deepest darkness into at least a glimmer of light. Haig opens his recollections by remembering what was possibly his darkest moment of all: a time in Ibiza in his mid-20s when he literally came to the edge of a cliff, seriously considering just walking off the edge and ending it all. In the rest of the book, he often returns to that moment, finding strength in the fact that he did, in the end, turn his back on the abyss --- and, in many ways, he has continued making that same choice, again and again, for the next 15 years. To what does Haig credit his hard-won recovery (which he recognizes is still an ongoing process)? Unlike many people with depression, he has never had success with drugs. He acknowledges that they help some people, but they never materially helped him --- and he is a firm believer that until medical science understands the brain's workings better than we do now, the process of medicating depression and other mental illnesses is imperfect at best. Instead, Haig primarily finds solace in books (both reading and writing them), in exercise (especially running and yoga), and in relationships with his children and his wife, Andrea (who was his girlfriend at the time of his initial breakdown and who continually buoyed him through the dark months that followed). Short chapters in a more traditional narrative form alternate with lists (of books he read during his recovery, of famous people who have battled depression, of tweets from others who have found their own #reasonstostayalive). He offers pages of suggestions of things to do to try to shake off the black dog of depression, or at least confine it to the shadows for a time. He also offers plenty of advice for caregivers on how best to deal with a loved one with depression (and what not to say). He offers imagined conversations between his past and present selves, showing his past self a future brighter than anything he could have imagined (especially since, as he notes repeatedly, imagining the future is literally impossible when in the depths of serious depression). Most importantly, Haig offers hope in the form of recognition of depression's

crippling power and a testimony that it can get better; he's a living proof of that. I would argue that REASONS TO STAY ALIVE is essential reading for anyone who has dealt with depression and for anyone who loves someone with the disease. Reviewed by Norah Piehl

This book helped me understand my own struggles, and how we are never alone in our pain. If you too are suffering, or know someone who is read this, it will help so much more than you think. Thank you, Matt Haig for this.

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