

The 4-Hour Body

AN UNCOMMON GUIDE TO
RAPID FAT-LOSS, INCREDIBLE SEX,
AND BECOMING SUPERHUMAN

Timothy Ferriss



CROWN ARCHETYPE
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TIM'S DISCLAIMER

Please don't be stupid and kill yourself. It would make us both quite unhappy.
Consult a doctor before doing anything in this book.

PUBLISHER'S DISCLAIMER

The material in this book is for informational purposes only. As each individual situation is unique, you should use proper discretion, in consultation with a health care practitioner, before undertaking the diet, exercises, and techniques described in this book. The author and publisher expressly disclaim responsibility for any adverse effects that may result from the use or application of the information contained in this book.

CREATIVITY ON DEMAND

The Promises and Dangers of Smart Drugs

This article was written by Johann Hari, an award-winning journalist who writes for the Independent, the New York Times, Huffington Post, and The Guardian. It was originally posted on [Johann's blog](#) in June of 2009.

It was in March, in the drizzle, that I realized my brain was burned out. Like a rusty engine, I could hear it chug-chug and splutter – but it would never quite start running at top speed. I had just come back from a rough month-long work-trip to Bangladesh, and I had an Everest of work in front of me. It was all fascinating, and all urgent – but I was plodding though it at half my normal speed. I needed to be performing at my best; instead I was at my worst. I stared at the London rain from my window, and slogged on.

That's when I stumbled across a small story in an American scientific magazine. It said there was a spiky debate across America's universities about the increasing use by students of a drug called Provigil. It was, they said, Viagra for the brain. It was originally designed for narcoleptics in the seventies, but clinical trials had stumbled across something odd: if you give it to non-narcoleptics, they just become smarter. Their memory and concentration improves considerably, and so does their IQ.

It's not an amphetamine or stimulant, the article explained: it doesn't make you high, or wired. It seems to work by restricting the parts of your brain that make you sluggish or sleepy. No significant negative effects have been discovered. Now students are using it in the run-up to exams as a "smart drug" – a steroid for the mind.

It sounded perfect. A few clicks on-line and I found I could order it from a foreign pharmacy, just £30 for a month's supply. I called a friend who is a GP, and told her what I was thinking of. She'd heard of people using the drug, and went away and looked up the details. "I think it's a stupid thing to do, because you shouldn't ever take drugs you don't need," she said when she called back. "Do I think it'll seriously harm you? No, I don't. But you'd be much better off taking a long holiday than narcolepsy pills." Then she warned me: "There is one known side-effect." Oh, damn I thought. A downside. "It often causes people to lose weight." Are you mad? You become cleverer and thinner? I whipped out my Visa card immediately.

A week later, the little white pills arrived in the post. I sat down and took one 200mg tablet with a glass of water. It didn't seem odd: for years, I took an anti-depressant. Then I pottered about the flat for an hour, listening to music and tidying up, before sitting down on the settee. I picked up a book about quantum physics and super-string theory I have been meaning to read for ages, for a column I'm thinking of writing. It had been hanging over me, daring me to read it. Five hours later, I realised I had hit the last page. I looked

up. It was getting dark outside. I was hungry. I hadn't noticed anything, except the words I was reading, and they came in cool, clear passages; I didn't stop or stumble once.

Perplexed, I got up, made a sandwich – and I was overcome with the urge to write an article that had been kicking around my subconscious for months. It rushed out of me in a few hours, and it was better than usual. My mood wasn't any different; I wasn't high. My heart wasn't beating any faster. I was just able to glide into a state of concentration – deep, cool, effortless concentration. It was like I had opened a window in my brain and all the stuffy air had seeped out, to be replaced by a calm breeze.

Once that article was finished, I wanted to do more. I wrote another article, all of it springing out of my mind effortlessly. Then I go to dinner with a few friends, and I decide not to tell them, to see if they notice anything. At the end of the dinner, my mate Jess turns to me and says, “You seem very thoughtful tonight.”

That night, I lay in bed, and I couldn't sleep. I wasn't restless or tetchy; I just kept thinking very clearly, and I wanted to write it all down. I remembered there's a long history of people in high-pressure jobs using stimulants when their brains lost their sponginess: Anthony Eden was taking Benzedrine all through the Suez Crisis, and Jean-Paul Sartre wrote several of his novels while pumped on mescaline. Admittedly, these precedents aren't encouraging: Eden had a break-down, and Sartre's brain was so cooked that for the rest of his life, he had the recurring fear that he was being followed by a giant lobster. Am I making a stupid mistake? Am I mad?

The next morning I woke up and felt immediately alert. Normally it takes a coffee and an hour to kick-start my brain; today I'm ready to go from the second I rise. And so it continues like this, for five days: I inhale books and exhale articles effortlessly. My friends all say I seem more contemplative, less rushed – which is odd, because I'm doing more than normal. One sixty-something journalist friend says she remembers taking Benzadrine in the sixties to get through marathon articles, but she'd collapse after four or five says and need a long, long sleep. I don't feel like that. I keep waiting for an exhausted crash, and it doesn't seem to come.

When the American journalist David Plotz took Provigil, he said it should be given a slogan. Just as valium was marketed as “the housewife's little helper,” he said this should be sold as “the boss' little helper.” It makes you work better and harder than before.

It's hard to explain Provigil's effects beyond that. Normally, one day out of seven I have a day when I'm working at my best – I've slept really well, and everything comes easily and fast. Provigil makes every day into that kind of day. It's like I have been upgraded to a new operating system: Johann 3.0. On discussion boards, I talk to American student doctors taking the drug, who say they feel exactly the same way. “I keep thinking – where's the catch?” one says. It turns out it is being given to US soldiers too.

It was then that I noticed: I just wasn't very hungry. I am normally porcine; my ex once seriously considered having a trough made for me. But on Provigil, I was filled up by a

bowl of soup and a piece of bread. I would feel stuffed half-way through my normal meals, and push the food away unfinished. One of my friends howled: "Who are you, and what have you done with the real Johann?"

Is all this just the placebo effect: I expect it to do this to me, so it does? Perhaps. But in the clinical trials, it worked much better than the placebo. But then I began to worry again. We don't know the long-term effects of this drug: nobody has been taking it for long. What if it causes your brain to deplete its resources and wear out? My wonderful grandmother has dementia, her life and personality dissolving in lost memories; no short-term concentration is worth that. A friend says to me one afternoon, "Why do you always feel like you're not good enough, and you need some kind of chemical enhancement?" It makes me wonder. There are also concerns that if you take it for too long, it can become addictive. So after five days on, I decided to take three days off, to see what would happen.

It was easy. I painlessly sagged back to my former somewhat-depleted state, as though the Provigil had never happened. I worked in my usual stop-start bursts. I ate my usual portions-and-a-half. I stared sadly at the pack of Provigil, and every time I hit a mental stumbling block, I had to discipline myself not to crack out a Provigil.

As soon as my three days were up and I started again, my brain revved back into super-speed and my stomach began to shrivel. But this time I began to worry about the ethics of it all. If this drug had been available during my A-Levels or finals, I would have been the first to guzzle it down. But isn't that cheating? What's the difference between Provigil for students and steroids for athletes? And if this drug becomes as popular as, say, anti-depressants or Ritalin, won't there be a social pressure for workers to take it? Many parents feel intensely pressured by schools today to drug away their child's disobedience; will they feel pressured by their bosses to drug away their natural fatigue?

Professor Anjan Chatterjee says, "This age of cosmetic neurology is coming, and we need to know it's coming." The use of Provigil and its progeny will be mainstream and mainlined in just a few years, he argues, and this made me feel excited by the prospect – and anxious. But all this raced through my brain as I worked faster (and ate less) than I ever have: it was hard to dwell on the drawbacks in those circumstances. As the end of my final five days approached, I had to decide what to do. Do I order another pack? Do I try to think all my thoughts at a faster pace from here on in with the power of Provigil?

I paced and agonised and finally concluded that taking narcolepsy drugs when you don't have narcolepsy is just stupid. Our lack of knowledge about what it does to your brain was, in the end, a deal-breaker for me. Perhaps in sixty years we'll know for sure it's safe, and I will have spent my life at only sixty percent brain-capacity – but I'd rather risk that than brain damage. So I have cut a deal with myself. I am keeping a pack in the bathroom cabinet for the days when I am really knackered and have to be able to work fast and fluently – but I won't ever take more than two or three a month.

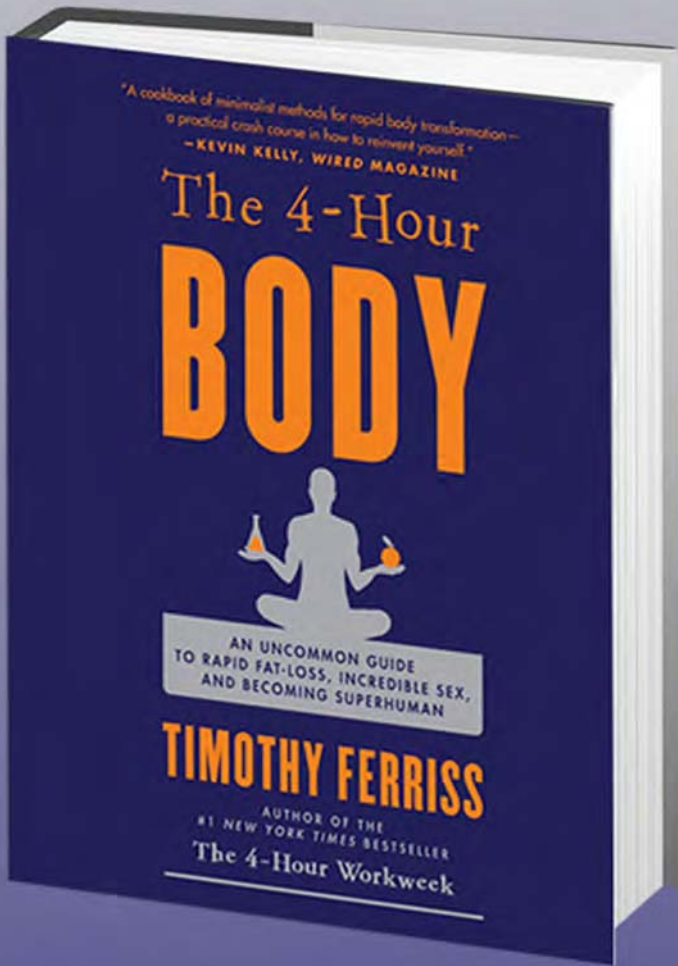
As I put the tablets aside, I look out over my flat. My desk is piled high with the vast quantities of work I have pumped out. My cupboards are full of uneaten food. The whole

place is freakishly clean, something I did in my spare time, without even thinking about it. Ah, Provigil, you are a gorgeous temptress. With a sad sigh, I close the bathroom cabinet on her sweet temptation, and stumble back to my slow, patchy life, with my slow, patchy brain.

POSTSCRIPT: Please don't email me and ask where I bought the Provigil. For legal reasons I have been told not to say, since I'd be partially responsible if you ended up getting poisoned.

You can follow Johann's thoughts on [his blog](#) and on [Twitter](#).

Tim Ferriss' New Book



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