

The first thing I noticed was nightmares

Marie: My name is Marie, and I joined the Army when I was 18 years old. I served from 2000 to 2009. I was deployed for OIF 1 and 2 to Iraq in 2003, 2004. We were right at the very beginning of the Iraq War. There wasn't even service routes established, and one of the biggest things that happened there was my squad leader was killed, and I kind of — I looked up to him, so losing him was crazy.

I remember the day it happened, it was, like, giant explosion, everybody scrambling around, and then it was okay, back to your work. You just kind of pushed it out of your brain at the time because you had so much else going on. You're, like, oh, I've got to get ready for my next mission, I've got to do this that and the other thing, so you didn't really even think about it or process it at the time at all.

When it really started to creep up on me was after we got home. I'm a very, very social person by nature, and so almost it was, like, for me a survival tactic of coping with life was kind of just always be out and about with people so that I wouldn't think about stuff, and I was doing all this stuff and there was still this aspect of being really lonely, because for the longest time I really, really missed my unit, and the people that I knew had been through the exact same things as me, and then as the months started going by then it was like my brain suddenly started remembering all this stuff.

The biggest thing I noticed first was nightmares, just horrible ones, to the point where if I was dreaming that I was in physical pain I would wake up with that physical pain, and then, yeah, just being very paranoid of loud noises. Mostly I just didn't talk about it to anybody. I'd just tell them surface stuff, like, oh, you know, this one time there was this — a really bad sandstorm, or I'd talk about the stuff but none of the really serious issues. I just got to the point where my insomnia and my nightmares were just slowly killing me and kind of feeling like, oh, there's nothing left for me in the world, kind of that really dismal mentality, and I started getting really, really sick. I went from being able to run 20 miles, I'm a distance runner, to not even being able to run two.

One day I was, like, I'm just going to go down and get registered with the VA, get in the system. For me, what was the most effective was finding—signing up for group therapy. That I actually liked and enjoyed because I could meet up with other Vets who were in massive pain like me and then I didn't feel like it was just me dealing with my issues, it was hey, we are all dealing with these issues. I feel like I've been on an uphill swing now for a while, which has been amazing.

I am super thankful that I did end up having the willpower to see through it and get the treatment that I needed. Because of that my physical health has greatly improved, and it's so much easier to manage your illnesses if you're actually willing to confront them and say, "Yes, I have this and I need to go find treatment, I need to figure out what medication works for me and just do the footwork, no matter how hard it is."



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