

Effectively managing bipolar disorder

Jesse: Hi, my name is Jesse. I am a spouse of a fellow Veteran as a Veteran myself. We were both in the Navy and that's actually how we met. I was a ship serviceman. I was qualified to do barber shop, but my main job was to run the ship store. I also worked for the Admiral on our humanitarian cruise.

It was very stressful. I mean, imagine going to your job, you're in a cubical, and you work next to the same people 24 hours, 7 days a week and your own personal space is the size of a coffin. That's why they're called coffin racks. That's the only space you have. Everywhere else you have the same people day in and day out. You eat the same foods. There's nowhere to go.

I remember we were doing a drill and all of sudden our Captain comes on and says one of the platforms exploded. We ended up bringing some patients on board our ship because our ship was the largest one in our battle group, so we had the bigger hospital. On the humanitarian cruise, I saw a lot of people that were sick of common things that are curable here, but not there, because they don't have the access to treatments like we do, and that was kind of hard, especially with the kids.

After the Navy, my husband was really, the only way I can really explain it is kind of withdrawn. I could see it, and I was having a hard time because I wanted to help him but I didn't know how to. I still had that military mindset; I couldn't help him to get out of that mindset when I was still in that mindset, and it was very difficult. He started looking to get help because we were fighting a lot. I mean, trivial marriage stuff but, finances and, I'm getting ready for another deployment and he's being torn up inside. We got help through the VA mental health clinic. I never actually realized there's a bunch of them in different hospitals but there are; they are in every hospital. We decided that, you know what, we're going to go see what they can do for us.

For me, on top of everything, I had mood swings. I was constantly up. I would be talking a mile a minute just I couldn't slow down; my brain was just constantly going. Then, there would be days where I couldn't even get out of bed. They diagnosed me with bipolar in 2006, I think. I didn't realize that they had suspected it while I was in the Navy because I would go nights without sleeping. I'm not sure about everybody else, but when they said they diagnosed me with bipolar, I kind of was relieved; I'm not making this up in my head because that was a big fear of mine was, I'm just, I'm making this all up. I'm somehow causing this. People think that just because you haven't gone through a traumatic experience you can't have certain things happen or feel a certain way. I still have my moments, though, and it will always happen. You're going to have up days and you're going to have down days, but you're able to cope better and understand what's going on.

I personally see my doctor once a month, depending on how I'm feeling. If I feel like something isn't right or I do feel unbalanced, I can see her anytime I need to. I'm on a mood stabilizer and it personally works for me. It helps me when I can't sleep. I take it every day. I was hesitant, don't get me wrong. It took me actually a few years before I agreed to take medication because I was thinking, "I can do it on my own. Now that I know what it is, I can control it. I can mentally stop it from happening," and I couldn't, and they gave me the medicine and it actually really did help. I was really surprised and I feel great because of it.



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