

Understanding and overcoming depression

Jennifer: Hi, I'm Jennifer. I served in the United States Army from 1990 to 2000, and then the United States Army Reserves from 2000 to 2009. I did some time in Afghanistan and a little bit in Iraq and sometimes in the Balkans.

It wasn't all good, it wasn't all bad being a female in the Army. I enjoyed a lot of it. Some of the things that I ran into just simply were a lack of belief that I could do a good job.

Getting out of the Army was a little bit more difficult. I couldn't relate to a lot of people in the civilian world. Before treatment I spent a lot of time just by myself and in my room. I slept a lot. That was my depression and my anxiety. I didn't want to go out. I didn't take care of myself at all. I didn't eat well, I didn't communicate well with my husband, it put a big strain on our relationship because he didn't know how to talk to me because of my depression. I didn't know how to talk to him either.

The sun rose, the sun set, holidays passed but I didn't enjoy it. Life was working me. I wasn't living life. And it just kept right on going, it was like a steamroller and I didn't find any joy in anything. It didn't matter if the sun was out, it didn't matter if there were puppies and kittens. It just didn't matter. I just wanted it all to stop.

I did have a hard time having relationships. I withdrew from everybody. I chose not to talk, I would get off the phone quickly or not even take calls. I wouldn't return emails and after a while people stopped calling and stopped emailing. They thought I neglected our friendship when in reality I didn't know how to deal with being a friend or being supportive at all. I just couldn't get out of my own way.

I couldn't see a future. I couldn't plan the next week let alone the next month. I really didn't ever see myself getting out of that hole. I didn't see anything. I'm hard pressed to remember exactly what it was, it may have been the birth of my nephew and I just decided that I wanted to be around for him and that just sort of prompted me that I needed to stop pushing away and then go find the help that I needed even if it wasn't through family and friends. And so, I turned to the VA Counseling System.

What helped for me was doing the talk therapy twice a month, medication and then I found an outlet starting a cross-fit program. There is something pretty gratifying picking up a weight and dropping that thing and hearing it clank. It gets out a lot of my anger and for like an hour, I don't have to think about anything other than picking up that weight a certain way and dropping it.

I like talk therapy. It works for me to talk and have somebody else point out the flaws in my thinking. So, I'm lucky I get to do it through the VA Jabber Program, so instead of driving I can go to my house and use my computer and we do video chat. I really, really like it. Being about an hour from the VA, it required me to take a lot of time off work, and then I was trying to juggle is it really worth it to go down there. So, with the Telehealth, I won't cancel a VA appointment for counseling now because I can do it by video.

I would say things are better for me now versus a year ago because I have a greater understanding of my depression and how to handle that. I can see the edge now when I get to that I'm like, "Okay, this could be a major depressive episode, let's stop." I don't



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

**MAKE THE
CONNECTION**

end up just calling off work and climbing in bed and hoping for the best. I can see a future and I can see where reaching out to friends and family helps.

I would say don't try to do it alone. When you are working on getting medication, don't go off your medication because you think you are better, work through the process of them getting your medication right. There are things having to do with mental health that sometimes we need. Don't go at it by yourself, talk to someone, someone.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

MAKE THE
CONNECTION