

Treatment helped after a traumatic brain injury

Thomas: I'm Thomas. I was a Wheel Vehicle Mechanic in the U.S. Army, with deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. I was doing some night work and I had bumped my head bad. I just wrote it off, you know, it's no big deal. They stitched me up, I'm good, and I was just kinda different after that. I didn't really care about anything anymore. I would forget everything. I just didn't eat for like two or three weeks. I mean, I lost a lot of weight. That's when people kinda got worried and, you know, I was just like "Whatever, I'm fine, no big deal." I didn't want anybody giving me any kind of attention or anything.

After Iraq, you know, I was still living in the barracks, I was kind of a hermit so I was really, I would say I withdrew into myself a lot. I didn't call my girlfriend near as much. She would always say "Why don't you call me, what's wrong?" I'd say, "There's nothing wrong, I just don't want to be bothered." I was a little angrier, too with co-workers and stuff like that. I couldn't get excited about anything. I felt like I couldn't really relate to civilians in general. I just felt like a stranger everywhere I went.

I got back from Afghanistan, hooked up with a rear detachment, didn't really know any of those people. I'd just drink, I'd drink every night and I'd wonder, I'm like I'm not having these horrifying nightmares or anything, but why the hell can't I just go to sleep like a normal person? I eventually, on my wife's insistence, went through my chain of command and went to behavioral health. It turned out that I got diagnosed with TBI and so, I got treatment. They recommended me to the OEF/OIF program, which was a great program and I was really thankful that they had that. I met with a case manager there. She told me about all the things that they do, the stuff that they provide. And by that point I was just like I'll do anything. Let's just attack this issue.

First, I went to see a Counselor just for one-on-one counseling and then they had a Social Worker and we would do our sessions, I think I met with them once every month or once every two weeks. They taught me relaxation breathing, a lot of like behavioral therapy, a lot of thought reframing. The couple's counseling I felt was really helpful for us. We would go for one-hour sessions at the Mental Health Clinic at the VA and we met with one of their doctors there. She really helped at educating my wife as far as what I'm going through and kind of the symptoms and what I've been through is causing and the behaviors that I'm exhibiting and things like that and so, she really helped us to kinda communicate a little bit more.

I don't go throughout the day looking at civilians. I don't get angry at them as much. I guess I feel more integrated I'm getting along a lot better with my wife. I've learned a lot of techniques and stuff from our treatment, from my individual and our couple's treatment and ways to deal with things. One of the quotes that has gotten me by is "The formula to success is fall down seven times, get up eight." And the people at the VA, they're professionals and once you can accept that and listen, and I mean just do it, do whatever they say and it works.



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