

## Treatment gave Erin tools to manage PTSD

**Erin:** I deployed to Iraq from 2006 in August 'till October of 2007. I was in the Army as a medic. It was after September 11<sup>th</sup> and pretty much the day you got to basic training they said, you know, pretty much all of you are going to deploy.

I don't think anything really in the medical field you can actually prepare for. I mean, because you have to use a lot of simulation obviously to simulate some of the battle wounds that you're going to encounter. So, we were prepared in how to treat it, but I don't think you can really prepare for that human aspect of injury and really how it affects you on different levels.

It was a long 15 months. Our unit had a pretty tough deployment, we lost a lot of people. I got sick while I was over there, I was down to 98 pounds. I lost a lot of weight and they didn't know why and the stress I guess was just getting to me. They sent me to a combat stress clinic in Baghdad where I spent a week there. You learn ways to deal with stress and you got to talk to a counselor or a social worker or a psychologist and they just evaluated you for your symptoms that you, you know, went to the clinic with and try to return you to duty. They changed my medication when I got to Fort Detrick and I had a hard time getting up in the morning, I could not get up in the morning. I was, you know, late to formations, I was getting yelled at and it was really difficult.

I was having some issues like with alcohol and just, you know, our group of friends that came from Fort Drum, we were all having kind of problems at the same time. And luckily my company commander recognized that and referred me to a program at Walter Reed that was a three week specialized care program that was to help people with PTSD or TBI that have tried other resources such as counseling or medication but they needed something a little more focused.

It was just a really good program, they taught you a lot of great techniques to use to reduce stress. They taught you about really how PTSD happens, why it happens, why you experience the things you experience, and it was just a very multi-dimensional program. You had a nutritionist, you had a psychologist, you had a caseworker, you had a physical therapist that worked with you; a neurologist. From every aspect that you needed medical-wise, you had at your disposal. There's not a standard treatment that's going to fit everybody.

So, they gave you multiple tools to try out. So, that's pretty much what I did. I went back to my unit and just tried out the various tools. I kept seeing a counselor once a week. I kept seeing a psychiatrist for medication management, and it's not like it just goes away. I mean you have to work at it. You're not going to just get out of a program or out of an inpatient hospital and just be better. And they tell you that. And it's something that you have to be actively engaged in so, that's just really what I try to focus on. It's getting better every day, it really is.



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