

## Exposure therapy helped Chad persevere and thrive

**Chad:** I am Chad. I served in the Marines from 1994 to 2006. My last job, I was a Tanker driver for the M1A1 Abrams main battle tank. We started backing up our tank on this little farm road and about 20 feet and someone set off an IED. They said it was equivalent to about a 500-pound bomb because it went right through the bottom of the tank up through the turret and pretty much right under my left foot. I was knocked unconscious what seemed like a second, but I was told it was probably minutes and I was just slowly coming to and not realizing what was going on. My left hand had shrapnel and it was broken and my wrist was broken and I didn't realize, tried to pull myself up and tried to stand up and everything under me was broken to pieces. Everything under my knees were just shattered. I wanted to continue in the Marine Corps and that was coming to an end because I got hurt and feeling the guilt because my Marines got hurt and feeling the guilt that I had to leave my Marines.

It was really difficult for my wife because she had to deal with the nightmares. She had to deal with the agitation and irritation and the hypervigilance and you don't sleep when you're actually suffering from PTSD.

I guess one of the good things about being injured, at least at the time when I did all this, is that they forced you into counseling. They forced you to talk to someone. They forced you to address the issues you are feeling about. And went and saw a psychologist and right away we did not connect unfortunately, so it was really hard to talk with this person. So I stopped going and it wasn't until late 2007 or about mid 2007 that my doctor and I, I had to have surgery again on my legs. They just, so much pain and so much pain medication I had to take just to walk and get out of bed and I was trying to work. I was like, "I got to do the amputation." I had a lot of anxiety about being back in the hospital because I just did not have a good time being in the hospital, being a patient. I really didn't want to be an inpatient again, be stuck in a bed again.

So, I went back to mental health at the VA and they set me up with this psychologist that pretty much right away, I got along with. He was a no holds barred. He didn't take any crap. He didn't let me have the pity party. We started with doing Exposure Therapy and I mean tell my story over and over and over. I probably went two times a week for six months and I can't believe how much that helped me. It was a real relief. So by the time I had my surgery in January of 2008 for a double amputation, I was comfortable. I was ready.

As an amputee, I think first thing you have to do is accept your situation. There are so many things I can do now that I couldn't do before with my legs. The only person that can stop you is you. You might not do it the same way you used to, but there is definitely a way you can do it now. I snowboard. I ride motorcycles. There is so much help out there today, different programs through the VA, through a lot of nonprofits. There's a lot of websites. There's help out there you just have to start; pick up the phone; check out the email; look at the website; talk to someone.



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