

Effective tools for managing anxiety and alcohol

Tristan: My name is Tristan. I was in the United States Navy from 2004 to 2008. We launched attack helicopters and Harriers from our deck and combat troop transports. Shortly after I got back, my cousin came and visited me in San Diego, great week. He had just graduated from college, and then he went back home and a month or two later he had a heart attack and passed away. So, that shook me and I started drinking really heavily. It's really easy to get caught up in drinking all the time and coming into work and when you're in port in the Navy, you work until 11 and go home.

I didn't ever go for any mental health treatment at all while I was active duty, but I realize now that I have some things prior to the military that were catching up to me. It was becoming increasingly difficult to operate in not just crowds, crowds are one thing, but even just small groups of people. If I'd walk into a room, ushered in by a person I just met, into a room full of people I've never met, it's an uncomfortable situation and you start to have the palpitations and the nausea and the sweating and the flight response and I'm starting to recall things that I never remembered before and that was when I was like, "Someone who knows what to do needs to tell me what's next." Self-medicating isn't going to work. It hasn't worked; it doesn't work.

So, I get into this anxiety clinic and I get into a group for cognitive behavioral therapy for social anxiety, and in that process we start to talk about the different kinds of social anxiety and there's PTSD on the board, those big four letters right there in front of me. I started to ask more questions about, "Well, what about this PTSD thing?" The VA initially really scared me too because I don't want to end up in a group with 10 combat veterans and talk about noncombat related PTSD, but the VA has combat PTSD clinics and other PTSD clinics. When you get in front of a professional and they say, "Oh, is that what you're doing? Well, that's called this. And do you also do this, because it's tied into that." It lets you get your arms around what's going on inside of you, inside of your head, and who deals with it better than providers at the VA. They see it all day, every day. So, even as unique a situation as you might be in, it still falls under a category or a concept that they know how to deal with.

There are plenty of reasons not to walk in and take the first step, but there are more reasons to step in. It's always hard to start something new, but once you do, once you take that first step and all the odd parts that you can't visualize and all of the parts of it that were scary because you weren't sure what it would be like kind of set into place around you and you say, "Well, this isn't weird, this is okay." And then you do it again and then you do it again and then you find yourself better for it.



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