

## Managing depression and living well

**Interviewee:** I would say the first time really with depressive symptoms, I was deployed on a ship and my roommate basically said, “You need to see someone.”

**Interviewee1:** This problem of depression and the anxiety that went with it and the other issues that evolved from military life and transitioning into civilian life, it showed up in very strange ways.

**Interviewee2:** I just wished I could just stay in bed for the entire day and just block out the rest of the world. You can’t do anything right, nothing in your life is working right. Everybody keeps saying, “Oh, just snap out of it.” But it’s not just snap out of it because you don’t see that light at the end of the tunnel.

**Interviewee3:** I wasn’t sleeping well or I was sleeping too much. You know, sometimes, so much was on my mind, I wouldn’t be able to sleep or I was just, you know, totally drained and I would just want to sleep all day. I didn’t really want to be around people. I’d try to isolate myself and stay away from others just because I wasn’t really comfortable speaking with them and talking about what was going on in my life.

**Interviewee4:** And I just, it felt empty. I would wake up. It’s hard for me to want to go to work. I realized that I have some anger. I have some depression issues. You know, I feel badly about myself. I’m having trouble getting myself out of the house. I’m having trouble doing things.

**Interviewee5:** Most of the issues that I was feeling at that time were related to depression. I had to refocus my direction. Civilian life just didn’t seem as structured as I would like it to be.

**Interviewee6:** I didn’t want to feel anything. I was incapable of feeling anything. I just wanted to be numb.

**Interviewee7:** I got out in ’93. I didn’t seek help until 1997 and that was through a friend of mine who was going to the VA and she said, “You know, you really, you’re not getting out of bed. You’re not doing anything. You’re not taking a shower and you really need to get some help besides medication and besides just laying around.”

**Interviewee8:** All of a sudden, I wasn’t surrounded by people who got it. My wife, my kids didn’t understand why I was different and I didn’t understand them anymore. So, I pulled away. When I first got out, I thought it was, you know, everyone’s fault that they didn’t get me. My wife said very plainly and I completely get why she said it. I don’t blame her for it. She said, “Look, either you get help or I get out.”

**Interviewee1:** I finally went to the VA in 2003 and it was because I had been working with Veterans and saw the other Veterans that were having problems were getting help and it was working. VA was working. These Veterans that would get into the system and get their health benefits and move on with their lives.

**Interviewee9:** I went to the Cognitive Thinking Therapy; I think it’s called CBT and that was very beneficial to me. It was a one on one where I sat down with the counselor and, you know, told him about some of the situations that I was in.



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**Interviewee6:** Once I got there, it was like an immediate effect, you know, talking about all these things that I never had the opportunity to discuss with anybody or the wives of how what happened to me and how I feel now.

**Interviewee5:** When I released that self-defense and I allowed those walls to come down, I began to interact with my counselor and it seemed like on a personal level where you have somebody you can trust. They can give you advice, suggestions and I can either take them or leave them, but it's coming from a third party, a neutral observer.

**Interviewee10:** So, I talked to some more doctors and tried a couple of things like antidepressants. At first, they didn't work really well. I went back and when we talked about it more. We kind of changed some things and then it started to help a lot surprisingly because I kind of never really believed in. I always thought that it was all in your head kind of thing like, "Oh, you're not really depressed. You just need to smile more or something like that." But it's, I mean, it's a real thing.

**Interviewee6:** It was the Trauma counselor that really, really helped me. She did a Cognitive Behavior Therapy with me. She began to show me ways that those, you know, thinking more positively and even just changing words a little bit. It's not, the rest of my life is going to be bad, it was just in the past, this part of my life didn't go exactly the way I wanted it to, but I have the whole future ahead.

**Interviewee2:** It made it a lot easier because then once I could recognize what was making me feel that way, then I could like talk myself down off that ledge to where when I start having those feelings, I can reach back into reality and say, "Okay, no. This is what's really going on." So, it's made life easier.

**Interviewee5:** It wasn't for the VA, I don't know if I'd be sitting here talking to you, you know, probably not. But I went and I got the treatment and the help I needed and now my life is completely different. I am able to face tomorrow.

**Interviewee8:** Now that I understand why I was feeling the way I felt, I was able to deal with it better. So, life is getting better and just choosing one thing each day to improve on and, you know, just one step at a time, getting better.

**Interviewee1:** It's important that people do understand that you can be an average everyday citizen and have a problem that needs outreach, that needs correction, that needs therapy. And you can continue on with your life. You can improve your life. Life will get better.

**Interviewee2:** You could still live. You get past it. You're not by yourself. You're not, like I say, "I always feel like that man out on the island." And that's just not so. There are so many different people who are going through the exact same thing.

**Interviewee7:** You know, you need to take that first step and get on the right path, but the first thing you need to do is talk to someone so you can get on that path.



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