

An honest conversation turned his health around

James: My name is James and I initially served in the Marine Corps from '94 to '98 after high school and then I made the decision after I graduated from college to become an officer and so I joined the Army National Guard in October of 2007 and received my honorable discharge in November of 2013. When we did deploy to Afghanistan in January of 2012 it was in February, just a month after we had gotten there where we had our first combat experience. I knew right then and right there that it had affected me; that something had changed because the way that I first described it and would still describe it is, that it felt like my brains had just been scrambled. Just everything felt disconnected and it was about three days after the attack where I had asked our company first sergeant at the time if he would want to step out back and have a smoke with me. Because he had been to several Iraq deployments and had seen a lot.

With everything that I was feeling at that time, I just knew something was not right and he told me as soon as I asked him, he said, "Sir, I can tell you right now that you have PTSD." It was very visible how angry I was and just my irritability was enough for them to basically put me on a plane and send me right away to the WTU in Fort Knox for treatment. WTU, Warrior Transition Unit, is a facility where wounded warriors from Iraq or Afghanistan will go to for various treatments, you know, whatever their case might be, you know, if it's a physical injury or mental injury with PTSD.

At the time, when I was at the WTU and when I came actually home, I did drink; I did abuse my prescription medications a lot. After having taken so many pills for so long I had gained about 80 pounds. So, I was grossly overweight for just my height and I had started to see my civilian doctor; he said, "So, it's your choice, with as overweight as you are; with where everything else is at." He says, "If you don't stop doing what you're doing to yourself right now one of two things are going to happen, you're either going to stroke out and die or you're going to have a heart attack and die. That's it, it's inevitable; this is what's going to happen unless you make a change."

And it was at that point in time that I went home, took all my meds, threw them in the garbage and then I spent about a month detoxing myself and just coming off of everything just to get it flushed out. Then I started going to the gym and started losing weight and now here we are sometime later and my blood pressure is normal; it's where it should be for being 41 years old. My cholesterol levels are probably some of the lowest that they've ever been and I've lost about 60 lbs. of the 80 that I gained. As far as just my mental health, it's really learning how to continue to manage PTSD and what works for me because, of course, what works for me might not work for somebody else and so forth.

I do still see my Psychologist at the VA every couple of months or so. We've gotten past the need for me to see him weekly or every other week like I had been. I have often equated this, and maybe it's because of my 10 years in the infantry, but I have often equated this to, it's just like going on a 16-mile, a 20-mile, a 25-mile work march. It's going to hurt; it's going to be long; it's going to exhaust you and at times you are going to think, "I can't do this. I can't take another step." but if you keep telling yourself that, if I put one foot in front of the other and I keep doing this that at some point I will finish this event and I will be better for it and I will get through it. It's the same, it's the same thing.



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