

Slowing down racing thoughts

Mitchell: My name is Mitchell. I joined the Air Force when I was 19, and that was back in December 2007 and served about 3 years, 2 years, 10 months and got out October 2010. I was a mechanic working on the flat lines. That meant driving out equipment that went all the way out to the F16s.

One week, I just had a bad week of no sleep and then I just had a manic episode. After what happened that sent me on a C130 over to the United States. I spent 3 days in Germany but I don't remember 1 day of it. They said I was just like a different person. I just felt like hopeless and it took until like the third month there to realize what was going on, where I was, what I needed to do. From there, I went to the outpatient program for like 3 or 4 months and then from there they sent me to Andrews Air Force Base. It was a nearby Air Force base and they put me to work like low stress work.

The first symptom of being bipolar is you think you're not bipolar. So, the whole time I was in denial, cheeking my medicine, didn't care what they said, until my second manic episode, like a year later at the patient quadrant. I went back in and then I was like all right, fine then I'm bipolar, like just all the things started matching up. I learned more about it. I tried to like track my triggers and watch my diet and exercise.

The basic things for a manic episode is grandiose. You get racing thoughts. You think really quickly. You have high energy. You get decreased need for sleep. So, your sleep gets less and less and less, and that's just bad for your body, just to not have any sleep. You become egotistical. You spend a lot of money. Risked behavior, reckless behavior, just start talking about doing to many things at once. You think you can take on so many different things and start, you have like 1,000 projects and you want to get them all done professionally and you're always going, always busy, and that's what I was doing. I thought I was like living a really good life and things were just coming at me and awesome, and then I just kept going up and up and up and then finally I fell off the cliff, and I just became illogical, irrational, impulsive.

The Air Force wasn't going to let me go into a distraught situation. So, they made sure I had the GI Bill ready, so a month after getting out all I had to do as a mandatory was one session per month, see my psychiatrist and that was the only interaction I had with the VA at the time. I didn't really like navigate the VA. I just thought it was a hospital. After a while when I got my second manic episode, when I like lost my home I went Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. everyday, just all day of groups, like 5-6 groups a day, lunchtime. I'd do that Monday through Friday and then you're like in that in the outpatient program.

I really needed that. I needed to learn how to like just interact and then get social again and just do all the basic stuff because that's what I think they are, they're pretty basic, just the CBT process, the content of behavioral therapy, and all the other, and it's usually just to vent, just to get it out and share your story. But, you're just more aware of what you're saying and what you're doing. You're just, reasons why you're thinking certain things. There are so many other Vet's working in there. My peer mentor, he was bipolar and schizophrenic and he was also a Vet. He was able to help me out and talk me through things that I was going through that the went through way before I did.



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My main trigger is sleep. It's hard to get sleep. So, I take risperidone to knock out at night, I take a psychotic. It took me like three times switching medications to find the right one for me. I know I need to take medication.

Right now, I between school so I'm working fulltime. The only thing that helps me stay really happy is just running. It's my passion, just staying fit, staying physically fit, being able to be resilient just because you think you're in a bad place, it's like I met so many other people that have mental disorders that are just like awesome in life, and they're just really unique, and my only advice is just put your foot out the door and just start asking and looking for help and you'll find it.



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