

Recognizing and managing anxiety

Kenneth: My name is Kenneth. I served in the United States Army as a Field Artillery Officer; served in Iraq from 2003 to 2004 and 2007 to 2008. I suffer really bad from migraines and actually had to be medicated for that. Developed really bad hypertension just because the anxiety and everything like that, I just couldn't relax. I couldn't calm down. Anything new or any uncertainty was just exacerbated by my anxiety; just little things that shouldn't bother me would really bother me, really get to me. It affected me through relationships, work, everything. It touched many different parts of my life. When you sign your contract for the military, they may say you're only serving three years, but they actually have you for eight. That's why after over two years, they were able to call me back for that remaining time.

Second deployment, I went back to Iraq and was put with a National Guard Unit. We were doing combatives, learning Brazilian jujitsu and I had an incredible anxiety attack. I'd never had an anxiety attack before to the point where I was just sweating profusely. I couldn't control any thoughts within my head. So, I just had to go outside, get away, and I pretty much broke down. You just don't know what to do. You're not sure how you're reacting on the outside while you're trying to control all your emotions on the inside. When I was sleeping, I would have vivid dreams. We would be getting attacked whether I was in Baghdad for a couple weeks of training or one of the out posts I was in in Southern Iraq. When we'd get attacked on a couple occasions, I couldn't distinguish between what was going on in my head and what was actually happening.

The second time I came back and left my job, the job that I was working at, the ice cream factory, they kept my job and when I came back, things were kind of a struggle between management and myself. Something would happen and I would over-react to them. To me, I thought I was reacting fine, but to them for this whatever small incident that it would be, I was blowing it way out of proportion. So, I just decided one day that I was gonna leave.

I finally admitted to it. That was a big thing. I admitted that I had a problem which was the hardest thing and from then on, I just went to the VA and started talking to a Counselor. He could read my body language as far as how I was feeling, the fact I was so anxious and he just got me to talk about it. Talk about what was going on, how I was feeling. I'm learning how to deal with my actions to deal with my issues; as far as how to deal with anxiety, how to reduce my anxiety. He understood where things were coming from and so far, it's probably one of the best things I've ever done.



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