

## A Veteran reaches out for help with TBI symptoms

**Andres:** My name is Andres. I was active in the United States Army and my rank was a sergeant and I served for five years active duty. My truck hit a roadside bomb twice, and that was probably the most defining event for me, was when I was actually struck by a roadside bomb and I was struck directly on the right side of my head. When I came back home my life was a lot different in that I still had ringing in my ears and headaches, you know, I was easily agitated. I was trying to prove to everybody that I was still normal, I could still do anything, and I wasn't hurt. The only problem with that was I started to notice that there were still issues and I still had headaches and I was still in need of help. Some of the challenges are just kind of being aware of how you've changed as a person, but also kind of educating other people how you've changed. I was very fortunate when I first got back because I had a girlfriend in Alaska that—she was just overwhelmingly supportive, but she noticed that maybe sometimes I'd get irritable or I wouldn't want to even sleep next to her, I'd isolate myself. That was very much often the case, but she was very patient.

I was very resistant at first to go to the VA, and I think there's several reasons for that. More than anything there's kind of a culture in the military where you're taught to toughen up, or to carry on, but it was in my base of support, my friends and family, and them encouraging me to go to the VA and registering, getting my ID card and filing for benefits and receiving basically the benefits that I had earned, and then as far as mental health I felt like it was the best thing for me to try to, because I've always been the kind of person that has tried to improve myself, tried to better myself, and so I felt like I wanted to better myself. I didn't want to face these issues 30 years, 40 years down the line and have it just, you know, effect my family and my friends in a negative way, so I decided I wanted to address these issues as soon as possible.

I go once a week and I have a female counselor and her name's Cathy, and she's great. I've learned these effective and helpful strategies. All these things have benefited me, not only from learning the strategies but also over time kind of lessening the extreme kind of tension or stress that I had before.

At one time or another we need help in our lives, and military Veterans are no exception to that rule in that what they've been through and their reaction to it is completely normal for any human being, but if they also seek help and if they're aware themselves and if they go to the VA and if they have a good base of support and let their friends and family know what their experience was, I found that it actually strengthens their own ability, not only to deal with stressors or deal with kind of challenges, but also to be successful in whatever they're passionate about.



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