

## An Army journalist takes on her PTSD

**Amber:** My name is Amber and I served in the Army for 10 years. I went in in 2003 and I served until 2013. I was PAO, so Public Affairs and that's kind of like the Army Journalist. I loved traveling; I preferred to be on a mountaintop somewhere. I preferred to be on a tiny combat outpost with our troops because I felt that was where the story was. Whenever we lost a Soldier, it was POA's responsibility to go out and photograph the memorial. Watching men clutch each other and cry and ask each other, "Why?" and see the confusion and see the way that after they'd lost several of their fellow comrades the way that it wore them down, that had an effect.

War has to do with death on a grand scale and you don't realize how desensitized you become and it wasn't until I was out, at this point, three and a half years is when I finally started to feel the effects of the fact that the majority of my career was in combat. I realized that I could possibly have some sort of PTSD symptom or that I had the effects of war in me. Prior to me having this realization, I have PTSD, I was diagnosed with Addison's disease and fibromyalgia and that was a huge life change.

That life change kind of put me into this serious depression and that depression is really what kicked off all of these other emotions that were buried down deep that I just wasn't aware of. And I started to experience anxiety attacks, depression, isolation. I didn't want to be around other people. I had a hard time making friends before and then it became increasingly difficult. It got to the point where, because of my anxiety attacks, I didn't want to leave my house. And all of the sudden the world became a very scary place.

I knew that I needed to see somebody because I had become suicidal and I knew that it had become serious and it wasn't until I finally called a triage nurse and said, "I'm previously suicidal, actually currently suicidal. I don't know what to do; I need help." And just in tears, just completely in tears; breaking down. And this triage nurse, I'll never forget her, she said, "Baby, hold on." And she put me on hold and by the time she came back she had got me a referral for outside help. Within the week I was seeing a Therapist. It was her that helped me to understand ways that I can deal with an anxiety attack; how to put together a plan. Those were the first steps of treatment, was how to get a handle on it so that I could continue to function in the world.

As a Soldier you constantly have this need to want to be tough; I had to learn that it was okay to fall apart. I had to learn that it was okay to break and I had to learn that it was okay to be broken. When it comes to treating yourself for military specific mental illness, it's very important that you find your tribe. Get to the VA and talk to somebody. Get into a support group. Don't be afraid; don't think that you are too good to go out there and get help.

It's a lot of better and it will get even better. I know that it will but, yes, I'm able to see things in a more honest light. I'm able to see myself in a more honest light and even though there's things within me that I'm not sure about, at least I'm aware of them now and that means that I can start to take care of them.



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