



## NATE'S STORY

Nate was a well-respected man. He had been in the Marines for fifteen years and had experienced many things from his time in the military. After his last deployment Nate began to suffer from PTSD. He also suffered from a minor injury, so he was prescribed pain killers to help while things were healing. Nate got to the point where the only time he felt good was when he was taking his meds.

Eventually, he began abusing his prescription medication just to escape from it all. He made up excuses to get more pain killers and had to start taking more and more to get the same effect. If he would go a day without it, he would be in so much pain that he couldn't stand it.

Finally, Nate realized he had a problem. He went to his doctor and got the help he needed. Nate was lucky because things could have ended very badly had he continued with the abuse. Nate was able to get back on his feet with help from professionals.

## SAFER CHOICES

### Dealing With Stress

Sometimes people simply need a healthy outlet for their stress. Here are a few suggestions on healthy alternatives to substance abuse:

- Play a sport – teamwork and adrenaline are great stress relievers
- Talk to someone about it – sometimes just getting things out in the open can help relieve stress
- Hang out with friends and family
- Seek help from a professional – If the stress simply becomes too much, it is better to get help from someone who is trained to help, rather than try to fix things yourself.

## PLACES TO FIND HELP

It is easy to feel helpless, but there is help out there, and you should never feel alone. It is never too late to get help.

Here's where you can find it:

- The military helpline: (888) 457-4838
- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information hotline: (800) 729-6686
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- Your local physician or counselor

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE

IN THE MILITARY



Printed on 30% Post-Consumer Recycled Paper

STAY SAFE SERIES

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# THE WAR WITHIN



## ALCOHOLISM AND BINGE DRINKING

### A Slippery Slope

Alcohol is a drug and just like any other drug, it's possible to become addicted. The problem is, alcoholism may not be obvious at first, especially if you drink regularly. Some signs of alcoholism include:

- You feel like you need alcohol to get you through the day
- You feel sick when you go without drinking
- You can't have just one drink – you have to keep going
- It's hard to get a buzz; you have to keep drinking to feel anything

More than half of all military members have admitted that they have abused alcohol and over forty percent say that they struggle with it.

Binge drinking is consuming several drinks in a very short period of time. When you drink a beer, a glass of wine, or a mixed drink, alcohol gets into your bloodstream and heads to your liver, which is the organ responsible for filtering harmful toxins out of your body. Your liver can process about one drink an hour. When you drink more than one drink, your liver has a hard time keeping up. You stumble and slur your words.

That “drunk” feeling is your body's way of telling you that you've had too much alcohol. If you keep drinking, you're putting yourself at risk for some very serious health problems. That's why binge drinking – **or drinking several drinks in a very short period of time** – can be just as risky as getting behind the wheel when you feel drunk or buzzed.



## PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

### Use as Directed

The abuse of prescription drugs is an extremely serious issue that is on the rise among military members. Since 2008 there has been an 11% increase of prescription drug abuse in the military. In many cases, even career military members have fallen prey to prescription drugs, ruining their careers because of the addiction. Most often prescription pain killers such as OxyContin are being abused but anti-depressant abuse is also on the rise.

Sometimes it may seem that these drugs are a great solution to the everyday stresses of military life, but that is simply not the case. Plain and simple, these drugs are harmful. When prescription drugs are taken other than as directed they can have harmful side effects on the body.

These long term effects include:

- Destruction of the organs
- A weakened immune system
- The breakdown of a body's physical endurance
- Ruined relationships
- Painful withdraws from addiction
- Anger and depression
- Thoughts of suicide

## PTSD AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

### Unhealthy Choice

Many military members who have served on active duty may suffer from PTSD or post traumatic stress disorder. It is easy to feel alone and like you have nowhere to turn for help. Many who feel this way turn to substance abuse to solve their problems. In all actuality, substance abuse can worsen the symptoms of PTSD and lead to further depression and suicide. It is better to seek help from a professional, someone who knows what you are going through rather than putting your life at greater risk.

## WHAT IS SUBSTANCE ABUSE?

Substance abuse is using a substance for anything other than its intended purpose which can lead to addiction. Once a person is addicted to a substance it becomes very difficult to stop abusing that substance. Many people tend to abuse substances to relieve the stress of everyday life and justify it by telling themselves that they have it under control. In many cases a person may be addicted before they even realize it, thinking they can quit at any time and then realizing that their body won't let them.

The military has a zero tolerance policy for illegal drugs, so the substances that are most abused by military members are alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs. These substances may seem harmless, but with the stress of life weighing down on a person, abusing these substances can most certainly lead to addiction and wrong choices. Misuse of these substances can cause behaviors that could end careers and ruin lives.

## TOBACCO

### The Killer Crop

Many service members start smoking or chewing tobacco to calm the stress of their duties. When you use tobacco, the nicotine immediately courses through your body and into your brain. It then causes your brain to release dopamine, a chemical that your brain releases when you do something fun.

The nicotine in tobacco quickly becomes an addiction and makes it difficult to stop. When you're addicted to nicotine, you have to keep using tobacco every time you want to feel the happy effects of dopamine. The more addicted you become, the more you'll have to use tobacco to get the same effect.

Some people think that cigars are safer than cigarettes, but that's just not true. Just one cigar can contain as much nicotine as an entire pack of cigarettes. That means that cigars are addictive, too. Pipe smokers face the same risks as cigarette smokers. When you use a pipe, you still breathe in a harmful amount of nicotine and other cancer-causing chemicals.