

Overcoming Stress and Anxiety: Strength Through Challenge

Everyone experiences stress and anxiety, whether it stems from workload, work environment, family challenges, or financial struggles. Sometimes, it results from a traumatic incident or the loss of a loved one. Whatever the cause, we all encounter it at some point. Understanding how to address mental health challenges and knowing the available resources can make a world of difference.

As a combat medic in the U.S. Army, I learned to recognize the signs of anxiety and depression and helped guide my teammates through difficult situations. Personally, I have found prayer to be the most effective way to navigate hardships. Psalm 147:3 states, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” Developing a deeper understanding of spirituality allows for meaningful reflection on the source of pain—and, ultimately, the ability to let it go.

Another method I rely on is spending time alone in the wilderness. The challenges of solo hunting build character, and the solitude fosters spiritual growth. This leads to another important principle: do hard things. Learn a new skill or push yourself further in an existing passion. Immersing yourself in the learning process serves as an excellent distraction from internal and external stressors.

At one point, I took on an Ironman 70.3—despite not being able to swim across an Olympic-size pool. The race begins with a 1.2-mile swim. Fortunately, I had five months to learn before race day. Whether it’s solitude in the wilderness or competing in an extreme race, challenging yourself to go further and achieve more will relieve stress and improve mental health.

Physical activity plays a critical role in mental well-being. Exercise helps reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression while improving mood, energy levels, and self-esteem. If the gym isn’t your thing, take up an active hobby such as hiking, swimming, or mountain biking.

Muhammad Ali once said, “I hated every minute of training, but I said, ‘Don’t quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.’” This is powerful advice, especially for those facing a season of stress or depression. Choosing to “embrace the suck” temporarily fosters a sense of peace and resilience. It strengthens mental fortitude and, ultimately, allows you to live like a champion.