

Helen's story

I suffered dissociative attacks for approximately 2 years before getting a diagnosis. At the worst of it I was having attacks 5-6 times a month

I would be going about my everyday business and then just suddenly black out, sometimes losing consciousness completely and other times being half conscious being able to hear those around me but unable to respond or move.

When I came round I would feel weak, exhausted, dizzy and confused and would feel that way for hours and often I wouldn't feel well for a few days after the attack.

Every doctor I went to would tell me I had fainted, that perhaps I wasn't eating properly, or that I was merely over doing it with my training, as I have always been very active. I knew it wasn't a faint because I would be out cold for 10 minutes or more often and took far too long to recover. I knew I was eating properly and I had tried cutting back on my training and had only found the attacks to increase!

I became quite withdrawn, I would still do my training and socialize but I was always nervous that I would black out and felt constantly on edge. I was embarrassed by my attacks and felt guilty that when they happened people had to take responsibility for me and stop what they were doing to take care of me. I was a student in my first year and away from my family living with other students, I couldn't expect those young like myself to look out for me and I knew my family worried terribly about me.

I was angry with doctors who just continued to tell me we can't do anything for you, I knew I couldn't continue to black out like this because it was not simply a problem for me but those around me and my family. The stress of worrying about all these things as well as trying to get on with everyday life made my attacks more and more frequent and this in turn made me more stress and I had therefore entered a vicious circle.

Once I was referred and got the right diagnosis, a huge amount of stress and worry was lifted from me. I no longer had to worry about anything really sinister being responsible for my attacks, I knew that they could at least be managed. This made me far less stressed which almost instantly had effect on my attacks and general wellbeing, my attacks became less frequent because I was less worried and because I knew the potential causes I started to recognise triggers that could be avoided quite simply. I could tell my family and friends that I was okay, I developed strategies and as my confidence increased I felt much more sociable and less nervous.

I now haven't had an attack for 4 or 5 months and hardly even think of them very often. I know that I may still have an attack but I'm not scared of them anymore and know that it's merely a glitch that I will deal with. Just having confidence in my diagnosis and determination that it will not stop me doing the things I enjoy helps.

I have also realised that when I'm too tired mentally to concentrate effectively on what I'm doing that is when I need to rest. If I do start to feel distant or lost I stay calm. I don't think about the possibility that I might have an attack. I just put my full concentration on whatever I'm doing or find something to concentrate on hard, even if it's just watching something or reading.