

'It Is Not a Time to Be Tough'

Retired 1st Sgt. Jonathan Sastre, a 21-year Army veteran, shares his journey with unseen injuries and a powerful message on the strength of seeking help

Aug 18, 2025

Retired 1st Sgt. Jonathan Sastre, 41, lives in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, with his wife, Stephanie, and their three children, Blake, Bennett and Declan. Sastre was inspired to join the Army after seeing his family members serve. After 21 years of service, Sastre's injuries and illness are affecting him and his family every day.

"I have PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), TBI (traumatic brain injury) and hearing loss and ringing. I also had six surgeries. These things all happened while serving overseas on one of my five combat deployments."

Sastre struggles to drive due to his TBI and how it affects his right eye. The motion of objects makes him dizzy and nauseous, causing Sastre to get sick almost daily. Additionally, Sastre underwent fusion back surgery and is constantly in pain.

"I'm afraid to hold my toddler at times because I don't want to drop him from getting dizzy," Sastre said. "My back doesn't help me at all ... [I] struggle to get out of bed and accomplish basic things a dad should be able to do with their kids."

Sastre's Army commander recommended VFW Accredited Service Officer Allison Krezman for assistance. Sastre also recommended Krezman to two other individuals from his installation. He eventually received a 100% permanent and total rating from the VA. Sastre believes it is important to document everything, keep records and continue to seek help.

"It is okay to be hurt. It is okay to be seen for things," Sastre said. "You and your family should be number one, always."

When making a claim, Sastre advises veterans to arrive at all appointments on time and be honest about their condition. He said the VA is there to help, and veterans must be willing to do their research to find what benefits are available.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

“It is not a time to be tough. You need to answer the questions about your conditions based on how you feel on your worst days,” Sastre said. “Make sure you are taking full advantage of all the benefits that are provided for you. The more you know, the better you will understand. The VA is here for you.”

Learn more about the VFW's [National Veterans Service \(NVS\) program](#).