
Treating Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder results in extreme mood swings that can greatly disrupt your life. It causes strong mood swings between depression and “mania.” These symptoms may cause you distress. But with treatment, you can lead a more normal life.

Medicines

Bipolar disorder is often treated with medicines that stabilize moods. They help you feel better by keeping your moods more even, and they help prevent future mood swings. Sometimes you may also be prescribed medicines that treat depression or for times when thoughts and emotions are so affected that you lose contact with external reality. Medicines prescribed are based on your symptoms, your response to the medicine, and the type and severity of side effects. Because of that, both the dose and the type of prescribed medicine can change over time. All medicines can have side effects. If you’re troubled by side effects, tell your healthcare provider. Changing the dose or type of your medicine may help. But don’t stop taking medicines or increase or decrease the amount you take until you talk with your healthcare provider. Unplanned medicine changes can cause serious side effects or the return of symptoms.



Talk therapy (psychotherapy)

Talking to a therapist or counselor may be part of your treatment. Having bipolar disorder can make it hard to hold a job or go to school consistently. It can create stress for both you and your loved ones. A therapist can teach you how to cope with bipolar disorder. This can help you lessen manic or depressive episodes, or even prevent them. Your therapist can help you work out problems and heal relationships. They can also provide support when you need it most.

Friends and family

Those closest to you may also need support. There are many groups for families of people with bipolar disorder. Learning more about this disorder can help your loved ones cope. It can also help them take an active role in your care.

Looking ahead

People with bipolar disorder have periods with no symptoms and can function successfully in a variety of settings. But it is a chronic illness that requires lifetime care. Just as with heart conditions or diabetes, bipolar symptoms can return, or treatments may need to be changed. Ongoing professional support is key to effective long-term management. Much research is being done on bipolar disorder. This research may lead to improved treatments and hope for a better future.

In an crisis

If you or your loved one is at immediate risk of self-harm or hurting others, call or text 988. You will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org. Lifeline is free and available 24/7.

To learn more

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- **National Alliance on Mental Illness** 800-950-6264 www.nami.org
- **National Institute of Mental Health** 866-615-6464 www.nimh.nih.gov
- **Mental Health America** 800-969-6642 www.nmha.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org