

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mental health issue that involves recurring episodes of extreme mood.

People with bipolar disorder can become over-excited and reckless, or imagine that they are more important than they are in real life.

They can also become extremely low, feeling helpless and depressed, with difficulty making decisions or concentrating. Some people mainly experience highs. Some experience mainly lows, and some experience both, becoming very depressed or extremely high. The person may then behave in an irrational or risky manner.¹

It is important to note that everyone has mood swings from time to time. It is only when these moods become extreme and interfere with a person's personal and professional life that bipolar disorder may be indicated and a doctor's assessment should be sought.²

Symptoms:

People with bipolar disorder can experience moods that do not necessarily make sense in the context of what's going on around them. The moods can be very disruptive and make it difficult to function in day-to-day life.

The symptoms of bipolar disorder will depend on which type of extreme mood is being experienced at the time. These moods are referred to as depression, the extreme low; and mania, the extreme high. These are not the same experiences for everyone, or for every episode.

Symptoms of depressive episodes can include:

- Feeling sad, hopeless or irritable most of the time
- Lacking energy and appetite
- Loss of interest in everyday activities
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering things
- Feelings of emptiness, worthlessness, guilt or despair
- Experiencing hallucinations or illogical thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Not taking care of yourself

Symptoms of mania episodes can include:

- Feeling full of energy
- Feeling self-important or full of ideas and plans
- Feeling easily distracted, irritated or agitated
- Experiencing hallucinations or illogical thoughts
- Lack of desire to sleep or eat
- Making decisions or saying things that are out-of-character and that can be risky or harmful

Episodes can often last for several weeks or months with periods of less extreme mood in between. The pattern of cycling between episodes of depression and mania can change over time and between individuals. People going through these cycles may not perceive changes in themselves, they may need the insight of a family member or friend.

¹ [Bipolar disorder \(sane.org\)](https://www.sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides/bipolar-disorder) - <https://www.sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides/bipolar-disorder>

² [3-symptoms-of-bipolar-disorder.pdf \(blackdoginstitute.org.au\)](https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/3-symptoms-of-bipolar-disorder.pdf) - <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/3-symptoms-of-bipolar-disorder.pdf>



Causes:

Bipolar disorder happens to people from all ethnic backgrounds. Although it can appear at any age, it's more likely to develop for the first time in someone's teen years or twenties.

Because bipolar disorder cycles through highs and lows, diagnosis can take a long time.

There are many different factors that can contribute to the development of a mental illness like bipolar disorder. These factors include genetics and psychological or social factors, for example, experiences of trauma and stressful life events. Significant use of alcohol and other drugs can also trigger symptoms of the disorder or worsen existing symptoms.

While excessive sleep can be a symptom, lack of sleep can also be a trigger, as can excess stress.

While bipolar disorder can affect anyone, regardless of age or background, rates may be higher among particular groups such as young adults, those who are unemployed or in receipt of benefits, and those who live alone.

Getting support:

Whilst there is not a cure for the disorder, you can learn to manage the symptoms through treatment. Bipolar disorder usually requires a long-term treatment plan often involving medication as well as psychological treatment and lifestyle approaches.

There are a range of approaches for the treatment and management of bipolar disorder, and the most appropriate method will vary depending on the type of bipolar disorder, whether you are currently experiencing depression or mania, and individual preferences and circumstances.

Lifestyle can help manage bipolar – getting the right amount of sleep, eating well, exercising and limiting use of recreational drugs and alcohol will have a big impact on the management of bipolar disorder.

Talking Therapies:

This involves working through thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with a clinical psychologist or other mental health professional in regular sessions over a set period of time. Some common therapies for treatment and management of bipolar include:

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) which teaches strategies for recognising how your feelings, thoughts, and behaviour influence each other and changing these patterns.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) which focuses on your relationships with others and how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are affected by your relationships and vice versa.

Medication:

Your doctor can discuss different medication options to manage symptoms of bipolar disorder. There are several medications that can be used to help manage mood swings. The symptoms of bipolar disorder generally respond well to medication. It is important to discuss with your doctor which one would be best for you.

Longer-term & self-management:

This can involve working with healthcare professionals to learn to monitor your mood and recognise the triggers of depression and mania. They may help you to develop a crisis or risk management plan, so you know how to manage any early warning signs. This often involves family members or close friends, so they are also aware of how to recognise and support you with any early signs of distress.

Longer-term management of bipolar disorder can also involve checking in regularly on your physical health as well as your mental health, and making sure that you get regular exercise, good quality sleep, and maintain a healthy diet.



Your doctor is a good place to start when seeking mental health help. The factsheet in this series *Getting Professional Mental Health Help* has more information on seeking professional help.

If you don't feel comfortable talking with your doctor about your mental health, you can look for another one who you are comfortable with. It may take some time to find the right doctor for you.

You can also contact the Black Dog Institute. The Black Dog Institute has support groups for people with bipolar disorder and other mental health conditions. Visit www.blackdoginstitute.org.au for more information.

If you need help now

If you think someone could hurt themselves or others, get urgent help.

Call emergency services

Dial triple zero (000)

Call Lifeline

Dial 13 11 14

About this factsheet:

This information is not medical advice. It is generic and does not take into account your personal circumstances, physical wellbeing, mental status or mental health requirements. Do not use this information to treat or diagnose your own, or another person's medical condition and never ignore medical advice or delay seeking it because of something in this information. Any medical questions should be referred to a qualified healthcare professional. If in doubt, please always seek medical advice.

Sources

Black Dog Institute - Information about Bipolar Disorder - Black Dog Institute - <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/bipolar-disorder/>

Reachout.com - What is Bipolar Disorder - https://au.reachout.com/articles/what-is-bipolar-disorder?gclid=CjwKCAiAxp-ABhALEiwAXm6lyYW1yYiY1mFMfODgS4FOuDqg3PzDgnPTK_EDtU2o_muAC78qPgUeZxoCeVMQAvD_BwE

Sane.com - Bipolar disorder -

<https://www.sane.org/information-stories/facts-and-guides/bipolar-disorder>

Mental Health Foundation UK - Bipolar Disorder -

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/e/eating-disorders>

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