



bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder which involves periods of both low (depressed) and high or excited (manic) mood states. It was previously referred to as manic-depressive illness. Bipolar disorder affects approximately 1 to 2% of the population.

WHAT CAUSES BIPOLAR DISORDER?

As with any illness, a combination of factors is believed to trigger bipolar disorder. These include a family history of bipolar disorder, stressful life events and the use of illicit drugs.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF BIPOLAR DISORDER

If you, a friend or a family member is experiencing the symptoms listed below, it's important to contact your family doctor. The symptoms may indicate a possible episode of bipolar disorder. Most people with bipolar disorder experience prolonged depression for weeks to months, with rather brief manic periods lasting days to weeks.

HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE A MANIC STATE?

- Increased energy
- Irritability
- Overactivity
- Increased spending
- Increased sex drive
- Racing thoughts
- Rapid speech
- Decreased sleep
- Grandiose ideas
- Hallucinations and/or delusions

'Ever since I can remember my brain has gone at a thousand miles an hour. I've had periods in my life when I virtually couldn't sleep at night... because my brain was going mad. Not mad, it was creative. Millions of thoughts, millions of ideas.'

HOW DO YOU RECOGNISE A DEPRESSED STATE?

- Low mood
- Irritability
- Loss or change of appetite
- Lack of motivation
- Low self-esteem

- Sleep disturbance
- Suicidal thoughts
- Hallucinations and/or delusions
- Difficulty managing small tasks or making simple decisions

'I was suicidal, withdrawn, isolated, hating the world, thinking everyone hated me.'

HOW IS BIPOLAR DISORDER TREATED?

A combination of medical and psychological treatments is used to treat bipolar disorder. Everyone is different. The most important thing is to receive a treatment that works for you. Your doctor can help with this.

MEDICATION

A mood stabiliser such as lithium, or other newer agents, is often used to treat a manic episode. Antidepressant medication is used to treat depression, usually in conjunction with a mood stabiliser.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPIES

Psychological therapies such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) are used to help manage symptoms of both a manic and depressive state.

HOW CAN YOU MANAGE YOUR ILLNESS?

- Educate yourself about the illness and its treatment.
- Talk to other people living with this illness or read their stories. Learn what works for them and how this may help you.
- Find a therapist you trust to help you work through issues.
- Learn to recognise the early warning signs of an impending relapse. If you recognise the signs and seek help early enough, you may be able to avoid a full relapse.
- Ask a trusted friend to help you. This person can advise you to seek help when your mental state is deteriorating. People with bipolar disorder may lose insight as their condition worsens.
- Draw on support from family and friends. Encourage them to find out more about the illness.
- Take medication as prescribed. When people feel well it can be tempting to stop medication. Stopping medication is a common cause of relapse.
- If your medication doesn't seem to be working, talk to your doctor. It may be possible to alter the dose or try a different type of medication altogether.
- Exercise regularly.
- Establish a regular sleeping pattern.
- Avoid artificial stimulants and depressants such as coffee, alcohol, marijuana and other drugs.
- Keep a diary of life events/stressors.



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HOW CAN YOU HELP SOMEONE WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER?

- Let the person know you've noticed a change in their behaviour.
- Suggest the person seeks help from a health professional.
- Encourage the person to take their medicine as prescribed by the doctor and keep appointments.
- Be aware of the warning signs of an impending mood swing. Encourage the person to see their doctor as soon as possible. If you are a close friend or family member, you could go with the person to see the doctor.
- Help the person make plans in advance to limit some of the damage that can be done during a manic episode. For example, when the person is well, make an agreement to withhold their credit cards during a manic episode.
- Educate yourself about the illness.
- Look after yourself. Seek support for your own needs by joining a support group, keeping in touch with your family doctor and taking time out. By keeping yourself physically and mentally healthy, you will be better equipped to support the person with the illness.

GETTING HELP FOR YOURSELF OR OTHERS

What to do in an emergency

If you or someone you care about is in crisis and you feel immediate action is needed, you can contact the services listed below and they will be able to assist you.

- Ambulance: 000
- Lifeline: 13 11 14
- Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 (up to the age of 18) (free call, 24 hours)
- Accident and Emergency department of your local hospital
- Call the local Crisis Assessment or Acute Treatment team. For contact details call your local hospital or health service provider
- Emergency appointment with your local general practitioner. Check the White Pages for the phone number.

FAMILY DOCTOR

Visiting your doctor is often a good first step in getting help for a physical or mental health problem. Some doctors may manage your mental health themselves, while others may refer you to a specialist such as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

It's not uncommon for bipolar disorder to be misdiagnosed, for example as depression only, alcohol or drug abuse, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or schizophrenia.

That's why it's helpful to make it clear to the doctor or counsellor that you are experiencing highs and lows. You may also find it helpful to write down what you want to say to the doctor before the appointment.

PSYCHIATRISTS

Psychiatrists are doctors who have specialised in mental health. They can make medical as well as psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Typically, psychiatrists use psychological treatments such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy or Interpersonal Therapy alongside medication.

PSYCHOLOGISTS

Psychologists are health professionals who provide psychological therapy (psychotherapy) in the treatment of mental illness or distress. Common types of psychotherapy are Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT). These are generally known as 'talking therapies'.

WHEN DO YOU NEED TO GO TO HOSPITAL?

Occasionally a person will need to go to hospital for treatment if they:

- Have severe symptoms
- Have complicated medical problems
- Are in danger of harming themselves
- Need specific treatments.

MORE INFORMATION

Telephone-based services:

A number of telephone help lines are available to assist you and provide information. OzHelp: 1300 OZHELP (1300 694 357) (Monday - Friday, 9am to 5pm EST).

SANE Helpline:	1800 187 263 (Monday - Friday, 9am to 5pm EST)
Carers Australia:	02 6122 9900
Mensline Australia:	1300 78 99 78 (7 days, 24 hours)

Web-based services:

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline

www.lifeline.org.au

Mental Health Council of Australia

www.mhca.com.au

MoodGYM

www.moodgym.anu.au



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing