

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING BIPOLAR DISORDER

What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder is a treatable mental health condition characterized by significant mood shifts between highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression). With proper treatment, people with bipolar disorder can lead stable, fulfilling lives.

Recognizing Mood Episodes

Manic/Hypomanic Symptoms (elevated mood):

- Increased energy, activity, or restlessness
- Decreased need for sleep
- Racing thoughts or rapid speech
- Feeling euphoric or unusually irritable
- Impulsive or risky behavior (spending, sexual activity, substance use)
- Feeling invincible or overly confident

Depressive Symptoms (low mood):

- Persistent sadness, hopelessness, or emptiness
- Loss of interest in activities
- Changes in sleep or appetite
- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Daily Management Strategies

Take Medication Consistently: Mood stabilizers and other medications are essential. Never stop medication without consulting your doctor—even when feeling great.

Maintain a Strict Routine: Regular sleep/wake times are critical. Disrupted sleep can trigger mood episodes.

Track Your Mood: Use a mood chart or app daily. This helps you and your provider identify patterns and early warning signs.

Know Your Warning Signs:

- **Mania:** Less sleep needed, increased energy, racing thoughts, irritability
- **Depression:** Oversleeping, withdrawal, loss of motivation, negative thoughts

Avoid Triggers: Get 7-9 hours of sleep consistently, limit caffeine and avoid alcohol/drugs, manage stress through relaxation techniques, avoid overscheduling or high-stress situations.

Build Support: Stay connected with family/friends, attend support groups, communicate openly with your treatment team

Create Structure: Plan daily activities, set realistic goals, maintain work-life balance

Exercise Regularly: Moderate exercise helps stabilize mood—but avoid intense late-night workouts that disrupt sleep

Treatment Options

Medication: Mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, antidepressants (used carefully), or combinations

Therapy: Cognitive behavioral therapy, family-focused therapy, interpersonal and social rhythm therapy

Lifestyle Management: Sleep hygiene, stress reduction, routine maintenance

Support Services: Peer support groups, psychoeducation, case management

Working with Your Treatment Team

- Report mood changes early—don't wait for full episodes
- Be honest about medication adherence and side effects
- Discuss substance use openly
- Review your mood tracking together
- Create a crisis plan for emergencies
- Involve trusted family/friends when helpful

Warning Signs to Report Immediately

- Decreased need for sleep or inability to sleep
- Increased impulsive or risky behavior
- Rapid mood changes
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Symptoms interfering with work, relationships, or daily life
- Stopping or missing medications

Preventing Relapse

- Take medication exactly as prescribed
- Maintain consistent sleep schedule
- Monitor mood daily
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs
- Manage stress proactively
- Attend all appointments
- Act on early warning signs immediately.

Resources

Crisis/Support: 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (call or text) • Text HOME to 741741 • **Emergency:** 911 • **Support:** Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) 1-800-826-3632 • Contact your psychiatrist or treatment team

This tip sheet is for educational purposes. Always consult your healthcare provider about your specific treatment plan.