

BIPOLAR DISORDER

WHAT IS IT?

Bipolar Disorders cause extreme fluctuations in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. Bipolar Disorder is the **overarching name** for a group of **three different conditions** – bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymic disorder.

Bipolar I disorder is a manic-depressive disorder that can exist both with and without psychotic episodes.

Bipolar II disorder consists of depressive and manic episodes which alternate and are typically less severe and do not inhibit function.

Cyclothymic disorder is a cyclic disorder that causes brief episodes of hypomania and depression



DIAGNOSIS

Bipolar Disorder diagnoses typically occur around the **age of 25**, but it is possible – though uncommon – for adolescents to be diagnosed. To be diagnosed with bipolar disorder, a person must have experienced **at least one episode of mania or hypomania**. A doctor will also ask about your family history of mental health disorders.



AN EVALUATION MAY INCLUDE:

- **Physical exam:** Your doctor may do a physical exam and lab tests to identify any medical problems that could be causing your symptoms.
- **Psychiatric assessment:** Your doctor may refer you to a psychiatrist, who will talk to you about your thoughts, feelings, and behavior patterns. You may also fill out a psychological self-assessment or questionnaire. With your permission, family members or close friends may be asked to provide information about your symptoms.
- **Mood charting:** You may be asked to keep a daily record of your moods, sleep patterns or other factors that could help with diagnosis and finding the right treatment.

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SYMPTOMS

People who live with bipolar disorder experience periods of excitement, overactivity, delusions, and euphoria (known as mania) and other periods of depression. Bipolar may become more severe or frequent with age or over time *if this condition is left untreated.*

A **hypomanic episode** includes elevated mood, increased self-esteem, and a decreased need for sleep; lasts at least 4 consecutive days and is present most of the day, almost every day.

A **manic episode** includes similar symptoms, but in this time the symptoms are severe and can impact daily functioning or cause other psychotic symptoms that last for at least a week and are present most of the day, nearly every day.

An **episode with mixed features** may include **extreme sadness, guilt, and worthlessness**, while also experiencing **high energy, racing thoughts and speech, and overactivity**. It isn't uncommon for a person to go from being exuberantly happy to be expressing suicidal thoughts in a matter of moments.

3+ symptoms must be present and indicate a significant change in behavior

- Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
- Decreased need for sleep
- Increased talkativeness
- Racing thoughts
- Distracted easily
- Increase in goal-directed activity or psychomotor agitation
- Engaging in activities that hold the potential for painful consequences, e.g., unrestrained buying sprees

*5+ symptoms within 2 weeks must be present for the diagnosis of a **major depressive episode***

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
- Loss of interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities
- Significant weight loss or decrease or increase in appetite
- Engaging in purposeless movements, such as pacing
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt

DID YOU KNOW?

Bipolar disorder occurs in up to 2.5% of the population, but the prevalence is much higher among first-degree relatives of individuals with bipolar or schizophrenia disorder.

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TREATMENT

The best treatment for bipolar disorder is a combination of medication and counseling. This process requires patience, as some medications need weeks to months to take full effect. Medications also may need to be adjusted as your symptoms change.

Bipolar disorder is treated with three main classes of medication: mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, and antidepressants.

Mood stabilizers:

You'll typically need mood-stabilizing medication to control manic or hypomanic episodes.

Anti-anxiety medications:

Benzodiazepines may help with anxiety and improve sleep, but are usually used on a short-term basis.

Antidepressant-antipsychotic:

It works as a depression treatment and a mood stabilizer.

Antidepressants:

Your doctor may add an antidepressant to help manage depression. These medications can sometimes trigger a manic episode, so it's usually prescribed along with a mood stabilizer or antipsychotic.

Antipsychotics:

If symptoms of depression or mania persist in spite of treatment with other medications, adding an antipsychotic drug may help.

Finding the right medication or medications for you will likely take some trial and error. If one doesn't work well for you, there are several others to try.

