

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT BIPOLAR DISORDER

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## What Is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness, is a chronic mental health condition that affects 2% of the U.S. population. It causes mood swings that may include extreme highs (mania/hypomania) and extreme lows (depression). These extreme highs are called manic (very intense) or hypomanic (less intense) episodes and include symptoms like increased energy, elevated or irritable moods, little need for sleep, and grandiose or impulsive behaviors. The extreme lows are called depressive episodes and can include sadness, hopelessness, fatigue, difficulty with sleep (including too much or too little sleep), and low mood. Persons with bipolar disorder usually develop symptoms in their late teens through their early 40s, and initial episodes are more likely to be depression than mania or hypomania. Prompt diagnosis and treatment can result in improved quality of life, decreased symptoms, and decreased risk for suicide.

Bipolar disorders include bipolar disorder type I and bipolar disorder type II. Type I is characterized by 1 or more manic episodes with or without depressive episodes. Type II is characterized by 1 or more hypomanic episodes but no history of manic episodes. Major depressive episodes are common in both types.

## Who Should Be Screened?

Screening should be done at least once if you fall into any of the following high-risk groups:

- People with a family history of bipolar disorder
- People with depression
- People planning to start using antidepressants
- People with anxiety disorders
- People with substance use disorders

Screening involves your doctor asking you a series of questions about your moods, energy, and behaviors.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

Diagnosis of bipolar disorder involves a thorough medical history (including family history) and a mental health evaluation with questions about suicidal thoughts and actions. It may also include a physical examination or tests to rule out other conditions.



## How Is It Treated?

The goal of treatment is to restore function and quality of life and to prevent complications, especially suicidal, impulsive, and risky behaviors. Treatment involves a combination of medications and psychoeducation. The goals of this education are to:

- Help with medication adherence
- Help identify triggers and early warning signs of relapse
- Provide strategies to manage symptoms
- Monitor sleep

It may take time for symptoms to subside with treatment. Medication should be continued indefinitely to prevent relapse. It is important to continue to work with your doctor and mental health counselor to monitor your response to treatment over time. With appropriate ongoing treatment and support, many patients with bipolar disorder can live a stable and fully functional life.

## Questions for My Doctor

- How can I minimize the side effects of bipolar medications?
- How long will it take for me to feel better?
- Can I drink alcohol while using bipolar medication?
- What additional treatments are available?
- How often should I go to the doctor for monitoring of my disease?
- Is medication safe to take while I'm pregnant?
- How long will I have to take medication?

## For More Information



### MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/bipolardisorder.html>

### Mayo Clinic

[www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355955](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/bipolar-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20355955)