



# BIPOLAR DISORDER

## What Is Bipolar Disorder?

**Bipolar disorder is a treatable mental health condition that affects your moods.**

People with bipolar disorder have episodes or periods of extreme mood swings:

- **Depression** – During which they feel very low and lethargic.
- **Mania** – During which they feel very high and overactive.

**Symptoms of depression and mania can sometimes be mixed together or switch rapidly back and forth.**

People with bipolar disorder often experience changes in their energy levels, behavior, thinking and sleep. During bipolar episodes, it may be difficult for individuals to carry out their daily activities.

## What Are the Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder?

The symptoms of bipolar disorder depend on which mood you're experiencing at the time. The mood swings can last for several hours, days, weeks or even months.

During the manic phase, symptoms can include:

- High levels of energy and activity.
- Rapid thoughts and speech.

- Not wanting to sleep or eat.
- Easily distracted.
- Increased recklessness.
- Easily annoyed.
- Episodes of psychosis, during which you see or hear things that aren't there or believe things that aren't true.

**During the depressive phase, symptoms may include:**

- Overwhelming sadness.
- Fatigue, low energy and lack of motivation.
- Loss of interest or pleasure.
- Indecisiveness.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- Irritability.
- Uncontrollable crying.
- Feeling hopeless or worthless, which could lead to thoughts of suicide.

*If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text 988. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential support 24/7.*

## How Common Is Bipolar Disorder?

- Bipolar disorder affects an estimated 5.7 million adults in the U.S. every year, or about 2.6% of the U.S. adult population.<sup>1</sup>

- The prevalence of bipolar disorder is similar between men and women and affects people of all races, ethnicities and social classes.<sup>1</sup>
- Bipolar disorder symptoms typically start during late adolescence or early adulthood, with 25 years as the median age of onset.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly two-thirds of people with bipolar disorder have at least one close relative who was also diagnosed with the illness or with unipolar depression, which indicates that genetics play a role in its development.<sup>3</sup>

## How Is Bipolar Disorder Diagnosed?

**Bipolar disorder is diagnosed based on the length, frequency and severity of symptoms over a person's lifetime.**

Bipolar disorder is commonly divided into three basic subtypes – bipolar I, bipolar II and cyclothymia.<sup>4</sup>

- Bipolar I is defined by manic episodes that last at least a week. The manic symptoms experienced can be so severe for people with bipolar I that hospitalization is needed. Typically, depressive symptoms

also occur separately and last at least two weeks.

- Bipolar II is defined by episodes of depression and hypomania – a less severe and more brief form of mania. Although the manic episodes are less severe than experienced with bipolar I, the depressive episodes of bipolar II tend to be longer and more intense.
- Cyclothymic disorder – also called cyclothymia – is defined by reoccurring depressive and hypomanic symptoms that are shorter and not as intense as symptoms associated with bipolar I and bipolar II.

To diagnose bipolar disorder, a healthcare provider will usually take a careful history of current and past mood symptoms. They may do a physical exam or order medical tests to rule out other health conditions. They may refer you to a mental health professional for evaluation.

It's important to distinguish bipolar disorder from depression, because medications often used to treat depression can be unhelpful for people with bipolar disorder – or even make mood symptoms worse.

## How Is Bipolar Disorder Treated?

The high and low periods of bipolar disorder can be so extreme that they get in the way of everyday life. Although bipolar disorder can be challenging to manage, there are several different treatments and strategies available.

Treatments and strategies for managing the symptoms of bipolar disorder include:

- Medications prescribed to prevent episodes of depression, mania and hypomania, as well as to treat the symptoms of mania and depression when they appear.
- Psychological treatment – also often referred to as “talk therapy” – can help people with bipolar disorder recognize the triggers and signs of an episode of mania or depression, and provides advice about how to deal with depression and improve relationships.
- Healthy lifestyle choices can play a role in helping to manage bipolar symptoms, including regular exercise, good sleep habits and limiting substances such as caffeine and alcohol.
- Support groups can help provide an opportunity to share insights and find hope and inspiration from peers. To learn more about support groups for people with mood disorders and their families, visit the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) website at: [www.dbsalliance.org/support](http://www.dbsalliance.org/support)

A combination of treatments and strategies can help people with bipolar disorder stabilize their moods and live the lives they hope for. Be sure to talk to a healthcare provider for advice about specific medications and treatment options that would work best for you.

## For more information about Bipolar Disorder:

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)  
[www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

International Bipolar Foundation (IBPF)  
[ibpf.org/get-help](http://ibpf.org/get-help)

International Society for Bipolar Disorders (ISBD)  
[www.isbd.org](http://www.isbd.org)

### References:

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2. Baldessarini RJ, Tondo L, Vazquez G H. Age at onset versus family history and clinical outcomes in 1,665 international bipolar-I disorder patients. *World Psychiatry*; 2012 Feb; 11(1): 40–46. Accessed at: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3266753/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3266753/)
3. Dailey MW, Saadabadi A. Mania. July 17, 2023 *StatPearls*. Accessed at: [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493168](http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK493168)
4. National Institute of Mental Health. Mental Health Information: Brochures and Fact Sheets – Bipolar Disorder. Accessed at: [nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/bipolar-disorder](http://nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/bipolar-disorder)



**In crisis? Call or text 988**

For mental health and suicide prevention information and resources, visit the Rural Mental Health Resilience Program website at [www.RuralMinds.org/resilience](http://www.RuralMinds.org/resilience) or via the QR code below:

