10 Tips for Sleeping Well With Bipolar

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Bipolar and Sleep: Getting Rest With Bipolar

Sleep is an incredibly important aspect of your life. The right amount of sleep leaves you refreshed and rejuvenated physically. Too much or too little sleep will leave you foggy, disconnected and sluggish. Where your physical health goes, your mental health follows. But bipolar and sleep often don't go together; when bipolar disorder is a part of your life, your sleep suffers. Sleep disturbance is actually one of the cornerstones of bipolar disorder.

When your mood is more depressed, you will have less energy and less motivation. You are prone to sleeping more throughout the day, including frequent naps. Some people with depression will get 14 to 16 hours of sleep daily and still feel tired and lethargic. Others suffer from insomnia related to depression and are unable to sleep more than a few hours daily.

When your mood is elevated from a manic episode, sleep is the last thing on your mind. You are too driven by other pleasure-seeking tasks to consider getting rest. Why sleep when you could refold your towels or count how many toothpicks you have? Even if you try to lay down when manic, your racing thoughts may not slow down enough to allow you to sleep. Combine this with the diminished patience associated with mania, and sleep is not in the forecast.

You're already aware of the impact of both bipolar and sleep. So, what can you do about your bipolar and sleep problems? In this article, I will offer some advice to help you turn those sleepless nights or oversleeping moments into healthy sleeping patterns. First, we will begin with the benefits of sleep and then go in-depth with some bipolar and sleep tips.

What Are the Benefits of Sleep for People Living With Bipolar?

If you have given up on the idea of getting good rest, then rethink it. The benefits of appropriate rest extend to numerous aspects of your mental health, physical health and overall well-being. Benefits of sleep include:

- **Improved memory and attention.** Have you been forgetful at work or home? Sleep helps strengthen memories and skills learned during the day.
- **Longer life.** Studies show that people who sleep too much or too little tend to have shorter lifespans than those who receive the desired amount of sleep.
- **Healthier weight.** People who are well-rested tend to have healthier weights. People who get less sleep tend to feel hungrier.
- **Lower stress.** Sleep allows your mind and body to get the rest it needs to reduce stress. Lower stress is related to many physical health benefits, like lower blood pressure.

Track Your State

Bipolar is unpredictable. Sometimes you will be depressed for a month, manic for two weeks and then depressed for the next three months. Maybe your symptoms shift more rapidly, or maybe your mania or hypomania only present yearly.

Whatever the case, tracking your bipolar symptoms is essential. Rather than thinking of it as one mental illness, think about bipolar as two: depression and mania. The tools and interventions effective for depression are usually not useful for mania, and the measures to improve sleep during mania will not help much during depression.

Set aside time to evaluate your symptoms. How do you know when you are depressed? How do you know when you are manic? What about when symptoms are calm? Think about how your mood, energy levels, motivations, irritability, socialization and behavior changes throughout the course of your symptoms. Being able to accurately monitor and identify your state allows you to choose a course of action that is fine-tuned for your symptoms.

Find a way to track your symptoms that allows people in your life as well as yourself to clearly label your moods. A journal, chart, thermometer and color system are all effective tools. Experiment to find the tracking system that is best for you.

10 Ways to Improve Your Sleep Hygiene

If the problem is poor sleep, the solution is improving your sleep hygiene. Sleep hygiene means practicing and building habits designed to help you get improved quality and quantity of sleep. As mentioned, these will need modification for depression and mania. Here are some great sleep hygiene tips.

1. Build Routines and Rituals

Creating a system for sleep helps your body know what to expect. Try to go to sleep and wake up around the same times every day, even on weekends. Getting in rhythm trains your body to know what to anticipate. Rituals are the things that you do each night before bed. Perhaps, you have a drink of water, take your medication, brush your teeth and complete a relaxation technique before going to bed. Stay consistent and your body will reward you.

2. Know What to Subtract

Staying away from caffeine and nicotine for about four hours before bedtime is a good rule of thumb. These stimulants will activate your brain, making it harder to fall asleep, but it may be useful in small doses to stay awake during the day. Limit napping. Napping too much will disrupt your sleep/wake cycle and you may be too awake at bedtime. Avoiding alcohol is a less well-known tip. Although alcohol may make you feel relaxed and drowsy, the impact of alcohol will diminish the quality by interrupting your sleep. Again, stay away for four hours before bed.

3. Know What to Add

Proper diet and level of exercise can strongly improve your chances of getting to sleep. Check with your doctor to see what level of exercise is best for you. Test different times of the day to exercise. Maybe exercising in the morning will leave you energized for the day or exercising at that time might wear you out making falling asleep easier. Adding healthier foods into your diet will help maintain good energy throughout the day. When depressed, you may feel hungrier. When manic, you may not even think about food, but work to maintain balance. As a nice side effect, improved exercise and diet are linked to lower depression.

4. Use Your Bed

Part of building a good sleep routine is only sleeping in your bed and using your bed for sleeping. Let your body and your mind associate your bed with sleeping. Having a laptop or a cell phone in bed is stimulating and distracting. At the same time, make your bed and bedroom more conducive to sleep. Set the temperature to a comfortable level, purchase quality linens and room-darkening shades.

5. Have a Backup Plan

Even the best plans may not work all the time. Your backup plan should include getting up if you have not been able to fall asleep in 20 to 30 minutes. Leave the lights low while going into a different room and read a book or magazine. Avoid bright lights, electronics and TV.

6. Establish a Morning Routine

The above only consider what to do before you go to sleep, but having a routine after you wake up can improve your ability to get restful sleep. If the morning is a frenzy of rushed chaos, get a new routine. Start with leaving yourself plenty of time to complete your routine before leaving for school or work. Some people report trouble sleeping due to thinking about all the items that must be accomplished in the morning. Developing a routine will make the morning more pleasurable so there will be less worry at night. Wake up, turn on some peaceful music, drink a glass of water and have a balanced breakfast.

Special Considerations for Mania

Your needs during a period of mania will be much different from during periods of depression or normal functioning. The items listed previously will still benefit you during mania, with some adjustments. Want to find sleep during mania? Here's how.

7. Burn Energy

Often during mania, you may feel that your energy is endless. Use this energy in productive ways throughout the day rather than trying to limit the energy. Get out and go for a walk, take an exercise class or enjoy a bike ride. Planning and completing a scheduled form of exercise enables you to use some of the energy in ways that will benefit you come bedtime.

8. Give Yourself Extra Time

Symptoms of mania or hypomania require you to take more time prior to your targeted bedtime to unwind. You must prepare your body and your mind as part of the process. Starting 20 to 30 minutes earlier will improve the likelihood of success.

9. Write It Out

With the extra time, grab and pad and pencil — or laptop — to write. Write down all of the racing thoughts that are currently circling around your mind. You may find that there are only 25 things instead of 250. Writing it down allows you to clear it from your mind and begin working towards solutions.

10. Aim for Relaxation

When your symptoms fall into the range of mania, you will have excess energy that must be balanced through relaxation. Deep breathing, muscle relaxation, meditation, guided imagery and autogenic training are great methods to slow down your body and mind to achieve sleep. As with any relaxation technique, practice is necessary. Practice during the day so your skills will be sharp for bedtime.

In Conclusion

The importance of sleep and the risks of poor sleep cannot be overstated. Depression and mania associated with bipolar do their best to disturb your sleep. Through hard work, thoughtful decision-making and following the tips above, you can find the rest you seek. No need to sleep on it — start today.