Nine Strategies for Coping With Bipolar Disorder

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Coping With Bipolar Disorder – It Is Possible

The definition of the word cope is to “deal effectively with something difficult.” There is no doubt that bipolar meets the criteria for “something difficult.”

The way I see it, we can battle with bipolar or we can deal with it effectively.

My Nine Favorite Bipolar Coping Strategies

For me, the best way to live victoriously with bipolar disorder is to do what I can daily to avoid depressive and manic episodes. If I can prevent them from happening, I won’t have to navigate major disruptions to my mood and my life.

I want to share nine bipolar coping strategies that have worked for me. Not only do these skills help prevent mood disruptions, but they also work when you are smack dab in the middle of a manic or depressive episode.

Taking Prescribed Medication to Treat Bipolar Disorder

This is at the top of my list. After years of refusing to take medication (followed by a long journey to find the right medication combination that works for me), I am now convinced that medication therapy is the most effective way to treat bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder manifests because of a chemical imbalance in the brain. With bipolar disorder, we do not effectively produce and regulate certain feel-good chemicals (like serotonin and dopamine). This leads to extreme highs and very low lows.

While we cannot make our bodies produce the neurobiological chemicals needed to regulate mood, we can take medication to do that for us.

Therapy with a Licensed Therapist

In addition to taking meds, I also see a therapist regularly. This helps me stay accountable with my bipolar treatment. It also gives me the opportunity to work through any difficulties I may be facing.

Many people feel uncomfortable talking about their problems with a stranger. This is understandable. But, once you find a therapist you like, you build trust. They become a source of comfort. Before long, they are not a stranger to you anymore – they are a compassionate source of love and acceptance.

The Power of Belonging to a Group

There is something quite powerful that happens when you belong to a group of people who can offer you social support.

There are quite literally hundreds of support groups available to those of us who have bipolar disorder. Many of them are free. However; you do not have to attend a group for people with mental health issues to help you cope with bipolar. There are all kinds of groups to choose from.

You might enjoy groups that have nothing to do with mental health. These include Bible studies or other church groups, hobby-focused groups, exercise clubs, cooking clubs or sports teams. Just find something you think will help you get out of the house and start socializing.

Meditation

I talk about this one a lot. Meditation has changed my life. Meditating feels phenomenal while I am doing it, but the lasting effects have made my life so much more enjoyable.

Studies have shown that meditation relieves anxiety and depression, boosts mood, quiets mental chatter, and promotes mental clarity. I feel the positive effects of one 30-minute meditation session with my Zen group for a full week.

I was intimidated by meditation for years. Sitting with myself quietly for 20 minutes? No thank you! But, once I got in enough pain because of my bipolar symptoms, I became willing to try anything.

If you haven't tried meditation, I strongly recommend it. You can go to a local meditation meet up, or you can try one of the many guided meditations available on YouTube.

Walking

This is another one I talk about a lot. I started walking during a severe depression. I find that walking is a meditative practice. Walking for just 20 minutes at my local park makes me feel fantastic. I don't listen to music or talk on the phone while I am walking. I connect with nature and listen to my thoughts as they pass in and out of my mind.

Also, I walk at whatever my pace my body sets. I walk because it makes me feel good. It's not a race. I don't put pressure on myself to walk faster or hurry up. I just walk.

Find a Hobby You Love

Engaging in an activity that brings you joy is a great way to cope with bipolar disorder. Whether it is gardening, hiking, crafting, sewing, sports, or reading – find something that sparks your interest.

Find something fun and do it for the simple pleasure of just doing it. You don't even have to be good at it! Having a hobby is a great distractor. It gets your mind focused on something other than your mood.

Call a Loved One

This illness has a unique way of driving us into isolation. When bipolar has gotten the best of us, we don't want to interact with others, and we sure don't want to have to explain our depression or mania. However; staying in touch with people who care about us is essential to the recovery process.

I stay in regular contact with the women in my support circle. I talk to them every day, and they always know exactly what is wrong with me. Also, I am completely transparent with my moods and my negative thinking when it rears its ugly head. They help keep me sane.

Volunteer

Believe it or not, volunteering is a great way to cope with bipolar disorder. It frees you from the bondage of self.

By helping others, you feel connected to something bigger than you. You get out of your own head. You feel good about yourself. This gets you interacting with others and gives you a sense of belonging. Also, you make the world a better place.

Animal Therapy

I am an animal person. I am a shameless crazy cat lady with three kitties. They bring me so much peace and comfort. Research suggests that petting an animal releases dopamine in the brain, which is directly related to feelings of contentment. I cannot imagine a life without my animals. They have been with me through some hard times.

Find Your Own Bipolar Coping Strategies

I have shared my bipolar coping strategies, which I hope are helpful to you, but I also encourage you to find out what works for you. Maybe you're not an animal person. Perhaps you have tried meditation, and you hated it. That's okay!

Just keep trying. Keep searching. Try different things. This is your life, and I want you to enjoy it – even though you have this illness. Don't give up on yourself. You can cope with bipolar disorder. I believe in you!