How to Treat Bipolar Naturally

by FLISS BAKER

Try These Natural Remedies for Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a complex mental illness that is often managed using medication, but not always. As part of a treatment plan, there are many natural remedies for bipolar that can be used. I am on medication, but do a combination of many other things proven to lift mood and manage well-being.

The top three strategies for managing a mental illness are eating a balanced diet, exercising and getting adequate sleep. We can't function without eating or sleeping, and exercise increases endorphins and therefore our mood. We need to make sure we maximize all three.

Below are some natural remedies for bipolar that you can incorporate in your bipolar management plan today.

1. Eat for Health

I had an eating disorder, and as part of therapy, I had to learn about the importance of eating a balanced diet of three meals a day with snacks to keep blood sugar levels stable. We need to eat the main food groups — made up of carbohydrates, protein and fruit and vegetables — to keep our body at its best.

A good diet is about having color on your plate and reducing the amount of sugary, processed foods and drinks you consume. Food is fuel, not just about enjoyment.

2. Train Your Body to Sleep Well

Sleep is something we can all struggle with, particularly throughout depression and mania. There is no one cure for a good night's sleep but there are helpful tips to follow.

It's worth remembering we need to train our bodies to sleep properly, which can take time.

Our circadian rhythm regulates periods of sleepiness and wakefulness and dips and rises throughout the day. Our dips are less intense when we have sufficient sleep and more intense when we are sleep deprived.

Changes affect our body temperature, make us feel extremely tired and release the stress hormone, cortisol. To avoid this we need to implement a regular sleeping pattern as best we can.

Set an alarm to get a minimum of 8 to 10 hours of sleep a night, and try to go to bed and get up at the same time. Sleep in a cool, dark room — I have used a sleeping mask before to aid this.

What If You Can’t Fall Asleep?

There are many ways to induce sleep. A bath half an hour before bed not only relaxes the body but as the body

temperature cools down, we feel sleepy. A hot, milky drink releases tryptophan, a sleep-inducing chemical. This can also be found in protein-based foods such as fish or turkey.

3. Exercise

Exercise is not just about pounding it out at the gym. Getting active for half an hour four times a week is enough to help you feel better.

It's great if you enjoy the gym, but if you don't and you are struggling it can be as simple as walking around the neighborhood or playing with your children.

The key is to stay active — if you feel stuck to the sofa, go out for a short walk to raise your heart rate and release endorphins. It's about doing what you can when you can.

4. Herbal Remedies

Some people use herbal remedies and nutritional supplements for bipolar disorder:

- My consultant psychiatrist recommended omega-3 fatty acids, which help improve depression associated with bipolar disorder.
- There have also been small studies on magnesium, which is suggested as an aid to reduce mania and rapid cycling in bipolar.
- Bach flower remedies are good for reducing anxiety because of its calming properties.
- St. John’s Wort is renowned for helping with unipolar depression. However, it comes with a warning for bipolar (not to be used in conjunction with medication) and needs to be discussed with a doctor.

5. Alternative Therapies

Other alternative therapies — including acupuncture for bipolar disorder, massage, meditation, reflexology and osteopathy — are found helpful and work on relieving stress and tension in the body. I find massage and relaxation the most helpful.

I have had pseudo seizures in the past where my body expresses stress physically, and massages work on my muscles to release tension. Learning proper relaxation techniques and diaphragmatic breathing has saved my life and is recommended by all professions to calm the body.

Therapy for bipolar disorder has many known benefits, but did you know creative therapies have been proven to help those with mental health problems too? When I was an inpatient in a private hospital, we took part in art, music and creative writing sessions.

Painting a beautiful picture and writing a poem was creating something that allowed my thoughts and feelings to flow. Listening to music lifted me, but also made me cry, which allowed emotional release. I now write as part of my day-to-day life and I have creative writing to thank for that.

5 Simple Ways to Improve Your Mental Health

Now that you have found some natural remedies for bipolar that tend to the physical aspect of bipolar, there are a few ways that you can also improve your mental health.

Do What You Love

You need to do things you enjoy, even though it is sometimes very hard to think of anything when we are depressed. When I feel better I try to remember what I love and try to keep them up when I feel low.

I enjoy jewelry-making and reading books, but other hobbies could be watching your favorite film, going for a walk with lovely scenery, planning things with friends or doing a yoga class.

Find a Purpose

Finding a purpose is important. My purpose is being a good daughter, sister, friend and auntie and using my life experience to write and help others.

Doing things for other people brings an amazing feeling of value. I help an elderly gentleman by visiting him regularly and making him cups of tea. Hearing a “thank you” and seeing the pleasure on his face really makes my day.

Learn New Things

Learning new things stimulates the brain. There are tons of courses available online and in-person for you to try, like learning a new language, doing pottery or cooking.

I really enjoy reading self-help books and I find learning about self-compassion really helpful to stop beating myself up. I have also learned to give myself permission to stop and rest and not feel guilty.

Socialize

Connecting and socializing is key. It gives us a chance to share, talk, feel part of life and hear what other people are doing.

We find comfort and security from others and I love being around trusted friends and family where I am accepted for being me.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is very effective — it is is about living in the moment and feeling your surroundings to bring your mind into the now. If we ruminate over the past and worry about the future, we are missing living in the moment.

It is about stopping rushing, tasting the sandwich you are eating, feeling the water as you wash your hands, looking at the flowers in the garden — anything to focus your mind on the now.

There are many things to consider in this article and I know they may seem overwhelming. However, the way I live is being mindful of them all.

If I work on incorporating them into my day-to-day life when I feel able, and that is more than enough to help myself feel well.

The Takeaway

I hope that this article will help you find ways to cope with your condition while also aiding in the management of it.

While most natural remedies for bipolar are safe, it is important to discuss with your doctor first before taking any natural supplements or trying certain alternative therapies.