What It’s Like Dealing With Bipolar Paranoia

by FLISS BAKER

Is Paranoia a Symptom of Bipolar Disorder?

How many of us have thought people were talking about us or feared something wrong might happen? Has anyone been concerned their house might be broken into or something terrible would happen to their children?

We must remember in life that although we may not be able to experience paranoia to its extremity, we can always relate to our own lives.

Paranoia is not a diagnosis in its own right — it is usually a symptom of another mental health problem. These can include paranoid schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, paranoid personality disorder, severe anxiety, depression, and psychosis. People with paranoia may also see or hear things.

What Does Bipolar Paranoia Feel Like?

I have experienced paranoia through a medication change. One of my mood stabilizers was increased, and I had no idea what was happening until I read about the medication later.

All the symptoms I had been experiencing made it evident that I had been suffering from bipolar paranoia.

Being paranoid was incredibly lonely, and I felt isolated and detached from others. I was preparing to go on holiday with a large group of girls, but as my medication increased, I started to feel what I thought was over-sensitivity.

I seemed to analyze everything, and my thoughts took over. Did I look stupid? Was I fat? Were people talking about me? Had I said something silly? Was I being judged? I naively put it down to worrying.

As many of us do, I lost insight and didn't relate my change in thoughts to my medication. My paranoia got worse.

While on holiday I was convinced I was behaving strangely and conversation became difficult. I was analyzing every word and action, and it was overwhelming.

I felt distanced from the group with nobody to talk to. How could I tell someone I was panicked that everyone was talking about me? How could I vocalize my constant worrying and paranoia?

I always recommend that people speak out about their problems when managing bipolar and relationships, but I kept it all in. I told myself I'd look even sillier and that everyone had their issues and had come away for a break — no one needed to talk about my insecurities, so I said nothing.

So I complete a mood chart on a daily basis, and without realizing I had added the word 'paranoia' to my notes. My psychiatrist saw and immediately picked up on it.

I described my over-sensitivity and how it was impacting my life — it was relentless. My medication was immediately reduced, and within days the fear left me, and I felt rational once more.

It's amazing what a simple change in medication can do. I guess I've demonstrated how important it is to report any changes you experience to a professional.

How Does Paranoia Feel for Others?

I had a look on Twitter, and I think we can agree the pain, worry and fear in people's thoughts are evident:

“I have a permanent paranoia that people are upset with me. Probably stems from relentlessly upsetting people but not realizing all the time.”

“I apologize for being such a difficult person to love.”

“If my anxiety, depression, and paranoia don't calm down I'm gonna explode.”

“I don't want to live by myself tbh. I live in constant paranoia, I know it.”

*“me: *has a slight pain, only mildly inconvenienced* my paranoia: *banging pots and pans* Welcome to hell! Welcome to hell! Welcome to hell!!”*

“I can't even keep friends because I'm clouded by paranoia that they hate me or that I annoy them or that I'm embarrassing to be around.”

“I'm literally canceling a job interview because I have no clothes for it and I am petrified of going out and having to talk to people.”

Next page: paranoid thoughts and what causes them.

Paranoid Thoughts

There is always a fear that something terrible will happen — and it could be anything! For instance, you may feel busy shopping centers are going to be bombed. Therefore you can't go near them.

You may think other people or external things are responsible. You may fear people cannot be trusted, as they have wronged you in some way.

Paranoid beliefs can be exaggerated, unfounded and irrational. There is often no evidence to show the thoughts are realistic.

Different Types of Threats

You could feel at emotional risk, like I did when I felt everyone was talking about me behind my back.

Or you could feel at risk of physical harm where you believe someone might be trying to hurt you or even kill you. You may also think you are at financial risk and think someone is trying to steal from you.

Paranoia Impacts Your Day-To-Day Life

It is incredibly stressful to try and cope with bipolar paranoia. We all know how destructive stress can be and the impact it can have on your body.

Also, we might have anxiety, panic attacks, sweat, shake or have headaches. We may experience bipolar

cognitive impairment. Therefore we might struggle with concentrating or remembering things.

We might sleep less, which can impact how we deal with our day-to-day tasks. We may feel unable to cope with work.

Your routine may change, impacting when and what you eat. And what about our appearance? We may feel unable to wash ourselves and forget to take care of what we look like.

We can guarantee that all of the above will induce worry, fear, mistrust, and anxiety with feelings of victimization, frustration and being misunderstood. In turn, we will isolate ourselves from others with the fear of being judged.

What Causes Paranoia?

There could be numerous reasons, which include the following:

- Life experiences, which can make you vulnerable and stressed, and distrusting relationships could fuel suspicious thoughts.
- Physical illness, as paranoia can be a symptom of dementia, Parkinson’s, Huntington’s disease or stroke.
- Drugs and alcohol.
- Lack of sleep.
- Childhood trauma or abuse.
- Anxiety and depression.

What Can Help?

We need to look after ourselves, making sure we eat a balanced diet and exercise regularly.

Mindfulness is a great technique to train your mind to think of the present instead of ruminating over past or future thoughts.

It is worth keeping a diary to spot patterns of thought and be aware of any changes. If you're fearful paranoid thoughts are regularly occurring, you need to go and see your doctor.

When talking to others, always choose someone you trust as you are in a vulnerable state and need listening and understanding — any judgment will only fuel the paranoia.

It's also important to challenge your thinking using cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), where you interject your thought process to change your feelings and actions.

For example, “everyone is talking about me” could alternatively be, “I have no proof, all my friends are being nice, maybe they whispered about someone else, maybe their facial expressions look stressed because they have stuff going on at home.”

When thoughts go haywire and are difficult to control, relaxation is incredibly helpful. Learning to do deep breathing techniques as a way to calm the body is highly effective.

Ultimately, if you are paranoid, you need to seek a mental health professional. Tell someone you trust about your situation, try and take some evidence, and get the right help from qualified professionals.