5 Things to Consider When Bipolar Is Your Travel Companion

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Traveling With Bipolar: How to Travel With Bipolar Disorder

Whether you are jet-setting to a highly anticipated getaway destination, road-tripping to visit family, or taking a business trip; there are some important things you need to consider when traveling with bipolar disorder.

As people who live with this often maddening (and sometimes beautiful) affliction, we must always remember that we can't take a vacation from bipolar. It is with us 24-7, lurking in the shadows of our minds, ready to pounce at the slightest upset.

While traveling can be super fun and provide us with a much-needed change of scenery, we cannot neglect our own self-care in the name of travel. We must be vigilant about the impact a change in routine can have on our seemingly fragile minds – which can turn on us at the most inopportune times if we are not careful.

I'd like to offer a few helpful tips and things to consider when traveling with bipolar disorder. By following some simple suggestions, you can avoid triggers that have the potential to spark a depressive or manic episode.

Do Your Best To Maintain A Healthy Sleep Schedule

Sleep is one of the most important components to maintaining wellness when you are living with bipolar disorder. This doesn't change just because you take a trip away from home. In fact, healthy sleep is even more important when you are traveling with bipolar.

The change to your routine and the experience of jetlag can increase the likelihood of mood swings. This may cause you to become vulnerable to those nagging and unpleasant bipolar symptoms we all know so well.

While it might seem like a good idea to stay up late to enjoy just one more minute of nighttime fun on vacation – or, conversely, you may want to hit the snooze button in the morning and sleep the day away – this might be a bad decision. (So is staying up late to prepare for a business presentation.)

Do your best to go to bed and wake up at the same times you would if you were at home. Maintaining your sleep schedule will be better for you in the long run.

Beware Of Jetlag – It Can Throw You Off For Days

Be prepared for the effect jetlag may have on you. Many people underestimate how disruptive jetlag can be. Those of us who have been diagnosed with bipolar have to be especially careful that jetlag doesn't trigger a mental setback.

According to WebMD, "Jetlag can occur any time you travel quickly across two or more time zones. The more time zones you cross, the more likely you are to be sleepy and sluggish – and the longer and more intense the

symptoms are likely to be."

Jetlag happens because traveling great distances into different time zones throws off our circadian rhythm. This is the internal biological clock that helps control when we wake up and when we fall asleep.

External cues like light exposure caused by sunrise and sunset and mealtimes help to regulate our circadian rhythm. When these signals have been disrupted, it can cause us to feel out of sync. It takes time for the body to get acclimated to the new time zone – and usually, by the time it does, you are ready to return to your own time zone. (Go figure!)

Here are some helpful tips to manage jetlag:

- Set your watch to your new time zone as soon as you set off on your trip.
- Do your best to stay on schedule according to your new time zone.
- Take melatonin at night to go to sleep to accommodate your new surroundings.
- Stay hydrated. Drinking plenty of water will help your circadian rhythm adjust to change.
- Try not to oversleep. Get up in the morning at the same time you usually would according to the new time zone and avoid naps if possible.
- Get some exercise. A brisk walk can do wonders for the circadian rhythm.
- On your return home, immediately set your watch to your natural time zone and make adjustments to get back on schedule accordingly.

Don't be surprised if jetlag throws you off for a few days. This is entirely normal, and it's no reason for alarm. It may take your body a little while to return to its usual circadian rhythm.

You May Want To Consider Travel Insurance That Covers Bipolar Disorder

Because of the emotional randomness and mental unpredictability of bipolar, it is often difficult for us to live up to the well-meaning plans we make. This is especially true when it comes to travel plans.

We may make reservations, pay for a trip, and look forward to a vacation for months – only to plunge into the depths of depression the week of the trip with no desire to get out of bed, let alone travel. For this reason, it may be a good idea to get travel insurance that covers bipolar when you plan for a trip.

With travel insurance, you will be refunded the cost of your trip (including your flight, hotel accommodations, and maybe even rental car fees) if you cancel because you are having a bipolar episode. That way, if you can't travel due to your illness, the cost of your trip can be refunded so you can reschedule your plans for a later date.

Another benefit of travel insurance is that your medical expenses will be covered on your trip. If, for example, you are overseas and need to be hospitalized or receive medical attention for a bipolar episode, you can get the help you need because your travel insurance will cover it.

Some More Helpful Tips For Traveling With Bipolar Disorder

Here are a few more suggestions for traveling when you live with bipolar:

- **Keep your stress level to a minimum.** Traveling can be a stressful time. Keep this in mind going in and make preparations for how you will effectively manage stress along your journey.
- **Do your best to make plans and accommodations that will don't require you to rush through airports or speed along highways to be somewhere in a flash.** Give yourself plenty of time to make connecting flights or get from Point A to Point B.
- **Continue to maintain a healthy diet.** Traveling can easily give way to unhealthy eating habits. Remember; processed foods, refined sugar, and too much caffeine can trigger people like us. Be mindful of what you eat and drink.
- **Be patient.** Dealing with people while you are traveling can be frustrating. Remember to be kind and

understanding of other human beings who are also traveling. This will keep you cool, calm, and collected.
- **Don’t stay up all night.** We have already talked about the importance of good sleep while you are traveling. Just because there is a party going on all night doesn’t mean you have to attend. Go to bed!
- **Stay away from alcohol or keep it to a minimum.** As you probably already know, beer, wine, and liquor don’t mix well with bipolar meds.

Remember, you must take care of yourself when you travel. If you neglect yourself, you will pay the price.

Enjoy Your Trip, Embrace The Journey, Bon Voyage!

Taking a trip – whether it’s for business or pleasure – can provide a welcomed reprieve from your daily life. Those of us who live with bipolar disorder often spend a lot of our time managing the illness, coping with mood swings, and focusing on health-related issues others don’t have to worry about.

Getting away can often give us the mental and emotional boost we need to continue fighting the good fight – even if we have to work while we’re away.

As Roman philosopher Seneca once said, “Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind.”

A vacation can be a great way to relax our minds, calm our own emotional chaos, and rejuvenate our spirits. Visiting family can reconnect us with people we care about and remind us that we’re loved. Even if we have to leave on business, a short stay out of town can give us a new perspective on all that we have to be grateful for at home. Yes, traveling with bipolar can be a good thing!

So, if you have a vacation or business trip coming up, give yourself permission to enjoy yourself so you can maximize your experience. While breaking from routine and going into unfamiliar territory can be scary and unsettling for many of us, it can also be an exciting time where we create new, joyous memories or make noteworthy professional advancements.