Can Meditation Help People With Bipolar?

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Meditation for Bipolar

Living with bipolar disorder can be an unsettling, disquieting, and difficult experience – to put it mildly.

Many who struggle with this illness hear a relentless stream of voices in their head, which can make daily life almost unbearable and restful sleep downright impossible.

Others feel incredibly uncomfortable in their own skin – as if they want to crawl out of their own body and find someplace else in the world to call home, one that offers refuge from the bipolar bugaboos. I can relate to both experiences.

While I don't know about you, but I have been in hot pursuit of solutions to the often unmanageable symptoms brought on by bipolar disorder since I was diagnosed 12 years ago.

I have found some things that have helped – including medicine, although I still hate taking it – and I am always happy to share what has worked for me with those who also live with this maddening diagnosis.

How Meditation Has Worked For Me

I joined a Zen meditation group about a year ago, and it has worked wonders for me. It has given me an invaluable tool to quiet my mind, and it allows me to be present in my own body without feeling an overwhelming need to escape from it.

In the past, when others suggested meditation as a coping skill for dealing with bipolar, my response was usually something along the lines of, "Yada yada, meditation quiets the mind, blah, blah, blah. Nope. Not doing it."

Why? Because the last thing in the world I wanted to do was to sit quietly with myself and listen to my own thoughts. Quite frankly, the idea of meditation terrified me.

But, last year, I found myself running out of options.

For example, I had been to every support group and 12-Step community you could think of. I tried singing loudly in regular church services. Also, I was on a cocktail of psych meds that seemed to be helping, but not entirely doing the trick. I had clocked untold hours on the proverbial couch of several qualified psychologists.

The only thing I hadn't tried was meditation – so I decided I didn't have anything to lose. I found a local meditation group on Meetup, and I went with an open mind. The results have been surprising. It actually works!

So, without further ado, let's talk a little bit about meditation. Maybe after reading this article, you will throw caution to the wind and give it a try.

What Is Meditation?

Meditation (also referred to as “mindfulness”) is an ancient practice that is said to have originated in India thousands of years ago.

There are many definitions assigned to the word “meditation,” but my favorite is the Buddhist explanation which says that meditation is a conscious effort to change how the mind works.

Although there are many different approaches to meditation, the practice is a quieting of the mind where you reach a sacred space that transcends thought. Ironically, to reach this place, you first have to be willing to sit with the mental chatter and allow yourself to be unmoved by it.

The good news is, the more you meditate, the more quickly you move through the chatter. Also, you don’t just benefit from meditation while you are doing it. The effects stay with you long after you stop meditating.

Meditation is probably one of the most uncomplicated practices there is on planet Earth, but our minds want to complicate it. You don’t need any specialized equipment for meditating, and you don’t need to go to a class or workshop to learn how to do it. You just sit in the silence.

Next Page: The benefits of meditation for people with bipolar, the different types of meditation, and meditation tips.

Can Mediation Help People With Bipolar?

Extensive research tells us that meditation produces numerous benefits. This is especially true for those of us who have a brain that doesn’t want to work the way we wished it would.

If you have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, you can significantly benefit from meditation. Here’s how:

- Studies have shown that meditation regulates the production of Dopamine and Serotonin in the brain. These so-called “feel-good” neurotransmitters are responsible for feelings of contentment, well-being, and emotional harmony. Meditation helps to “turn up” the depressed brain, which is depleted of Dopamine and Serotonin, and deregulate overproduction of these chemicals, which leads to mania.
- Meditation directly impacts the prefrontal cortex in the brain, which is mainly responsible for your thought life and emotional regulation. Meditating generates clarity of thought and balanced emotions. It calms and quiets the mind, which reduces unwelcomed voices that seem to chatter incessantly for those who have bipolar.
- It has been proven that those who meditate regularly sleep more peacefully and have fewer unpleasant dreams.
- Meditation calms the amygdala, which is stress center of the brain that releases hormones that generate the “fight or flight” response. Science indicates that those of us who have bipolar disorder have a whacked-out amygdala. This cues the brain to experience depression and anxiety by the boatload. Meditation cools down the amygdala and brings about feelings of calm and tranquility.

With all these benefits to meditation, why wouldn’t you want to give it a try? It might help with your bipolar symptoms. Have an open mind!

The Different Types of Meditation

All you have to do to meditate is to close your eyes and sit in silence or be guided through an experience that brings you to a place beyond thought.

Nevertheless; there are numerous meditation methods available that will help orient you to the sacred space you can only find through the practice of meditating. I recommend that you find out which one you like best and

practice it as often as you can.

Here are three of the most popular types of meditation:

Zen Meditation

With Zen, you sit with what is called a “koan.” These are like riddles that can’t be solved. (“What is this?” is an example of a koan I have worked with).

You close your eyes and bring the koan to the forefront of your mind. Then, mysteriously, it takes you above your own thoughts to a beautiful place of serenity.

You remember the koan again and again throughout your meditation.

Guided Meditation

With this type of meditation, you listen to an outside voice guide you on a mental journey. You may be taken on a walk through the forest or asked to look at a blank movie screen.

Many people with bipolar disorder prefer to start their mindfulness practice with this type of meditation because they find it comforting to hear another voice rather than sit in silence.

There are plenty of apps available that offer guided meditations. Just Google “guided meditation” and you are sure to find one you enjoy.

Mindful Breathing

This is an easy one. With your eyes closed, you solely focus on your breath. You inhale slowly and deeply, and then you exhale slowly and intentionally.

This allows you to concentrate on nothing else but your breath, which clears your mind of any nagging thoughts.

Meditation for Bipolar Tips to Keep in Mind

It is recommended that you meditate twenty minutes a day every day for maximum benefit. This might sound like a long time, and it may feel like that at first.

The first time I went to my Zen group, we meditated for thirty minutes, and it felt like an eternity. But now, I am continually amazed at how fast the time passes, and I usually continue to sit with my eyes closed and stay in my sacred space longer than the time allowed.

Some Final Thoughts About Meditation And Bipolar Disorder

Here are some helpful tips I’d like to share about meditation:

1. **Just start.** Maybe you can’t do it for twenty or thirty minutes. Try doing it for five minutes. Then, when you feel comfortable, increase to ten.
2. **Don’t overthink it.** Just do it! Your mind will try to tell you that you can’t handle this experience. If I can, so can you!
3. **You can’t meditate wrong.** There is no right or wrong way to do it. You can’t screw it up! You just close your eyes and sit in the silence.
4. **The more you do it, the more comfortable you will feel doing it.** If you don’t like it the first time, that is okay. Try it again and again until you get more accustomed to the practice. I promise you will be glad you did.
5. **You will take your meditation with you into your daily life.** You will find that you are slower to anger,

quicker to patience, and more emotionally balanced throughout the day.

6. **Consider finding a meditation group to join.** This is a great way to meet interesting people.

So, there you have it. Those are my thoughts on meditation.

I sincerely hope you will give it a try. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I can tell you that meditation has brought peace and harmony to my life and I believe it will do the same for you.