How Do You Treat Bipolar Disorder?

by ANDREW MARC FELICIANO

Understanding Your Bipolar Disorder Treatment Options

Living with bipolar disorder can be extremely difficult at times. The mood swings, the confusing emotions, and the erratic behavior can be hard to put into words. Fortunately, there are ample amounts of research and bipolar disorder treatment options out there for people with bipolar disorder.

Different methods of treatments can help you cope with some of these symptoms, and one should remember that some forms of treatment work better for some individuals than others.

What Is Bipolar Disorder?

According to Mayo Clinic, “Bipolar disorder, formerly called manic depression, is a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania or hypomania) and lows (depression).”

During a depressive episode, you may experience symptoms such as hopelessness, catatonic depression, and/or a lack of motivation. This can affect your willingness to go to work, your willingness to go to school, and in extreme cases even your appetite.

Hypomanic episodes are another type of state of mind that people with bipolar disorder may experience. The symptoms for this episode often show itself as bouts of increased motivation, an overtly positive mood, less of a need for sleep (in some cases), and extreme productivity.

Manic episodes take the symptoms of hypomania to a much different extreme. During a manic episode, you may experience extreme difficulties with sleeping, euphoria, racing thoughts, paranoia, impulsive decision making, and irrational behavior. Your planning and organizational skills are likely to be significantly hindered during a manic episode.

There is also the potential of experiencing something called a mixed-episode. These episodes can be extremely dangerous and often the risk of suicide is significantly higher during these episodes. These occur when you’re experiencing the symptoms of both a manic and a depressive episode. An extreme example of this would be experiencing catatonic depression while having racing, irrational thoughts. The thoughts racing through your mind can be overwhelmingly negative due to the depressive aspect of these episodes. It’s even more important that you reach out for professional help when having a mixed episode.

Any of these types of episodes can be short-lived (rapid-cycling) episodes, or they can last months. If you are experiencing any of the symptoms of bipolar disorder, please seek professional help if you have access to it.

Different Types of Treatment for Bipolar Disorder

There are many kinds of treatment available for bipolar disorder. From different types of therapy to different

medications, to different forms of exercise, there are plenty of ways that you could try to treat your symptoms.

Finding the proper, all-around bipolar disorder treatment plan requires input from mental health professionals, but there are some lifestyle changes that you can make on your own to help treat your symptoms.

Different Types of Therapy for Bipolar Disorder

There's a large variety of therapies that can be used to treat bipolar disorder. According to Mayo Clinic, some of the main types of therapy include interpersonal and social rhythm therapy (IPSRT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoeducation, and family-focused therapy.

- IPSRT helps patients with bipolar disorder by focusing on stabilizing daily routines for things like sleep and mealtimes. Mood management tends to be significantly influenced by stability in routines. This can be especially true for many individuals with bipolar disorder. As we'll discuss later, maintaining a steady sleeping pattern and having a consistent, balanced diet can affect your mood significantly.
- CBT focuses on deconstructing negative behaviors and beliefs and making an effort to replace them with more positive ones. This type of therapy is especially useful for identifying the triggers of your bipolar episodes. It's often used to develop/bolster coping mechanisms and help patients deal with stress.
- Psychoeducation can also be helpful. Educating yourself as the patient, or your loved ones who are around you can help you all understand the effects of bipolar disorder. This is especially helpful for your loved ones because it helps them understand your bipolar disorder treatment plans and it helps them learn the best ways for them to support you. It also helps identify which behaviors of yours are being impacted by bipolar disorder.
- Family-focused therapy sessions can be helpful when trying to include your family in the treatment process. Many therapists will have experience in speaking with family members about their loved one's mental illness, so you won't have to tell them everything alone either.

These types of therapy are often used for both children and adults. However, if you have a younger loved one who is diagnosed with bipolar disorder, you should only take them to a child and/or adolescent psychologist with experience in treating bipolar disorder. Young people often don't have the coping skills and/or the emotional intelligence that an adult would be more likely to have.

Next page: More bipolar treatment options including medication and lifestyle advice.

Different Types of Treatment for Bipolar Disorder

Medications Used to Treat Bipolar Disorder

There are several types of medications that a doctor may use to treat the symptoms of bipolar disorder. Some of the main types of medications include mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, antidepressants, antidepressant-antipsychotic, and anti-anxiety medications.

- Mood stabilizers help control the manic highs specifically, but they also help control the depressive lows. Antipsychotics tend to be added when the depressive or manic symptoms are persisting through treatments by other medications.
- Antidepressants are used to help manage depression. However, some doctors may be hesitant to prescribe some antidepressants to people with bipolar disorder because they can trigger a manic episode. Some antidepressants are also associated with a higher risk of having suicidal thoughts. When they are prescribed, they are usually prescribed with an antipsychotic or a mood stabilizer.
- Antidepressant-antipsychotic medications combine both an antidepressant and an antipsychotic to act as two treatments in one. These medications work both as a mood stabilizer and antidepressant.
- Anti-anxiety medications like benzodiazepines are sometimes used to help treat any accompanying anxiety or issues with sleep. These aren't often used as long-term forms of treatment due to risky side effects that can occur due to long-term use.

- If you're experiencing anxiety and you don't want to take anti-anxiety medications, talk to your doctor about potentially incorporating CBD oil into your bipolar disorder treatment plan. Not only is it non-psychoactive, it's also natural. That being said, it's important to include your doctor in this conversation because many CBD products are currently unregulated, so there is a slight chance of there being other substances in the product. Things like THC can have adverse side effects for some people with bipolar disorder, especially when experiencing a mixed or manic episode.

Children and teens are often prescribed the same types of medications as adults, however, there is a lack of research on these medications' efficiency in treating children, so these decisions are based on prior research conducted with adults.

It's important to discuss with your doctor beforehand the risks of taking any medication for bipolar disorder. If you experience any side effects from taking any medications, be sure to let your doctor know, even if it seems benign.

Lifestyle Changes You Can Make on Your Own

Medications and therapy aren't the only things that can help you with your bipolar disorder. There are some lifestyle changes that you can make on your own that will help improve your overall mood and quality of life.

Diet, Exercise, and Changing Certain Aspects of Your Lifestyle

It's recommended that you stop any recreational drug use. If you're struggling to quit on your own, you should seek professional help.

Adding exercise and proper dieting to your routine can both have significant effects on your overall mood. Set up an exercise schedule that can fit into your weekly routine. Whether it be long walks, jogs, or runs, dedicating a few hours per week towards an exercise you enjoy is beneficial for both your mental and physical health. Maintaining an exercise routine and a balanced diet can help your mood significantly.

Stability in your weekly/daily routine is also very important. If you're able to, try to eat your meals and go to sleep/wake-up around the same time each day. If you're struggling with sleeping or eating in any way, it's important to inform your doctor.

Also, if other doctors give you medications, be sure to inform your mental health professional. Some medications have the potential to trigger episodes on their own, or when coupled with other medicines you may already be taking.

Keep Track of Your Moods

Throughout this process, you can also keep track of your moods. This can help monitor the progress you make throughout your therapeutic journey. It can also be helpful when meeting with your mental health professional, so they see how you're responding to your treatments. Consider keeping a journal to document your mood and any changes in it that you may experience.

Explore a New Hobby

If you have time, try out a new hobby or something you've always wanted to do or try. The natural bursts of dopamine you can get from exploring something new and creative can be a great boost for your mood.

If you've wanted to get into drawing, watch some guides on Youtube and pick up some colored pencils. Try and find something that's good for you, and add it to your daily or weekly routine.

This makes sure that you have something enjoyable to look forward to each week. If you're having trouble choosing a new hobby or keeping up with a current one, speak with your mental health professional to see if they have any suggestions for you. Sometimes there could be an underlying reason for this.

Spend Time With Your Pets

Spending time with your pets can help too. Often animals' positive moods can be contagious. Your animal will appreciate the attention too. For some people, the sense of responsibility and purpose from taking care of an animal can be helpful during the bipolar disorder treatment process. This is partly why animal therapy has become increasingly popular as a form of treatment.

If you're unable to care for your animal for any reason, it is important that you speak with your doctor, and any family or friends that may be willing to help for the sake of the animal's health.

Next page: More lifestyle changes, more on how bipolar disorder treatment works, and more.

Lifestyle Changes You Can Make on Your Own

Cut the Negativity

Cutting out any unnecessary negativity and stress in your life can also help significantly. If there are certain relationships in your life that are causing you a significant amount of negative stress, consider taking a break from those relationships while going through the treatment process (of course this is only if you can, if you're a parent or a caretaker this can be difficult). Let them know that you're going through some things and that you just need some time for yourself.

If it's someone who is extremely toxic and a negative influence on your overall well being, you should try and cut them out of your life completely. While it may be difficult at first, it could save you a lot and pain and heartache in the long run when you cut out negative relationships.

Evaluate how you feel about your job/school and other things. Sometimes this self-reflection can be a bit stressful, so this could be a good topic to discuss with your therapist. When you're able to identify what brings you happiness and what brings you more negative emotions, it's much easier to prioritize things in your life.

Making a list of things in your life, or a Venn diagram can also help you organize your thoughts throughout this process. It makes it easier to identify what you need to cut down on, or even cut out, and what other things you should focus on that will make your life happier.

Do you find that you're happier when you're doing creative projects? Try and bring some more creative outlets into your life. Do you feel like your job is slowly killing you? Think about considering other options if they're available to you.

How Does Treatment Help With Bipolar Disorder?

Getting treatment for bipolar disorder from mental health professionals can help you significantly. They can help by recommending treatment plans (and adjusting any current ones), and they're also able to prescribe medication as needed. While the effects of some medications can take a little while to kick in, once they do, often you'll start to notice improvements within a few weeks.

If you're prescribed mood stabilizers, you may notice that the emotional extremes from your mood swings may be less pronounced/extreme. This helps keep your mood balanced and leveled. If you're experiencing any hallucinations or racing thoughts from a manic episode, your doctor may prescribe you an antipsychotic.

If you're experiencing a lot of anxiety, your doctor may prescribe you with an anti-anxiety medication for a short period of time. These medications usually tend to work more quickly than, for example, many mood stabilizers. It's important to take these as prescribed because some of these medications can be highly addictive.

After taking your medication consistently as directed by your doctor, you may start to notice a decrease in the

frequency of these symptoms, a decrease in the severity, or they may vanish altogether. Regardless of the outcome, it's imperative that you keep your doctor informed throughout the entire process.

Often, part of the bipolar disorder treatment process is learning how to identify bipolar triggers. This is important because when you're able to identify your triggers, you may be able to catch the onset of an episode before it happens. This ensures that you're able to seek treatment as soon as possible. Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on this fairly heavily.

Not only will you notice changes in your mood over time, throughout the treatment process you will learn different ways to cope with your symptoms. You'll learn how to more effectively cope with issues that have the potential to trigger a bipolar episode too. For example, if anxiety is one of your triggers, you and your therapist may discuss different ways for you to cope with your anxiety.

Learning how to deal with your triggers more effectively can decrease the chance of having an episode. It can also help catch episodes early so you can start bipolar disorder treatment as soon as possible.

Growing With Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder can be a challenging mental illness to cope with at times. It can feel like you're drowning in a wide array of emotions that you just can't seem to escape. The mood swings are impossible to control, and your emotions can be a constant rollercoaster. This is why prioritizing treatment for yourself is a necessity.

If you have access to professional help, it's imperative that you take advantage of that. If you do not have access to professional help due to a lack of insurance, there are some resources that you can take advantage of.

Try new hobbies, diversify your diet, and add some exercise to your weekly routine to maximize the results. See the treatment process as an investment in your well being, and an investment in yourself. A well-rounded bipolar disorder treatment plan will benefit you both mentally and physically. As your mood starts to improve, you'll find that you may have a lot more energy and motivation to do the things you enjoy.

Throughout the treatment process, you'll learn a lot about yourself and your emotions. It's also very likely that (especially if it's your first time experiencing treatment) you'll learn coping mechanisms that you may not have known before. Not only will this equip you with the tools needed to handle episodes in the future, often the coping mechanisms that you learn throughout the treatment process can be used in your everyday life too.

If you're diagnosed with bipolar disorder, it is not the end of the world, nor the end of your life. There are plenty of people with bipolar disorder who were able to overcome the effects of the illness and excel – for example, there are even some famous people with bipolar disorder out there too!

It won't be easy at times, but with the proper bipolar disorder treatment, it's more than possible to both prevail and grow from the experience.